

# Theology & Racism 2

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THEOLOGY AND RACISM 2

# **INHERITORS TOGETHER**

## **Black People in the Church of England**

**JOHN WILKINSON  
RENATE WILKINSON  
JAMES H. EVANS JR.**

**INTRODUCTION BY RAJINDER DANIEL**

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Race, Pluralism and Community Group  
Board for Social Responsibility, 1985



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Rajinder K. Daniel, John Wilkinson, Renate Wilkinson, James H. Evans Jr.

The photograph on the cover shows a West Indian looking for accommodation in 1955. It is used by permission of the Radio Times Hulton Picture Library.

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# PREFACE

The Race, Pluralism and Community Group within the Board for Social Responsibility is concerned with the struggle against racism at all levels. It is clear to us that this struggle must involve painful examination by Christians of the ways in which Christian theology itself has contributed to the rise of racism. We have launched this occasional series of papers called Theology and Racism which will examine some of the theological aspects of racism and anti-racism. The first issue dealt with the Bible, racism and anti-Semitism. This is the first of two issues dealing with the questions facing black Anglicans.

KENNETH LEECH  
Race Relations Field Officer

# INTRODUCTION

**Rajinder K. Daniel**

'Spots' are prominent in my thoughts as I write this brief introduction. What do spots do to a teenager? There is self-consciousness; an awareness of being looked (stared) at; some isolation; even shame – some use of make-up to cover those spots . . . This of course is a temporary phase in life; there are now remedies available. Sufferers of chronic skin conditions are perhaps, more often than not, treated with caution and distanced because of their complaint – causing them pain, isolation and a feeling of inadequacy.

Zacchaeus in St Luke 19 had, in a way, similar problems. He was despised, lonely and a physically small man with obviously a great sense of inadequacy, wanting acceptance. People kept him at a distance, except for his own kind, and he had to reach out to those around him. One can see that he wished to be noticed, recognised and accepted by others. We find Jesus, with extraordinary perception, doing exactly that for him. He entered into Zacchaeus' house, sat at his meal table – eating and drinking – thus giving him that fullness of life.

The Jews in Egypt knew what it meant not to have fullness of life. Their experience of being slaves, being dehumanised and having no status or value had given them a deep insight and taught them many a lesson; even though they were a Chosen Race. Despite 'the Deliverance' by Moses history had repeated itself and we find once again the Jews are in bondage – this time under the Romans.

Jesus in St John 10 says: ' . . . I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full' (JB). Full means 'filled to utmost capacity, holding all its limits will allow . . . ', the definition in the OED continues for a whole column length to give complete meaning to this word 'full'. This must have sounded very hollow in the ears of the Jewish hearers – 'having life to the full' would be incomprehensible under the Roman occupation.

How this 'fullness' can be for an individual or a group of people depends on so many factors – sociological, political, financial and educational . . . , factors which often are intertwined, hidden and even subtle. Man himself is such a very complex being. In the story of the Creation we see to some degree the absence of this complexity. Life is simple and straightforward. There is no competition, no rivalry, no political infights, no race differences, no subjection and no disease. And all is well!!

Judaism, Christianity and Islam take on board this beautiful picture of tranquillity and peace; it is the 'fullness' that Jesus talked about. But in that 'fullness' (freedom) there is that little bit of restriction, that tiny bit of obedience and subjection. True not to a fellow human being (but then there weren't any others!) but to Yahweh. So it transpires that man desires, albeit through outside influence, for even that subjection and subordination to be removed. Thus we have the story of the Fall. However, despite all the ins and outs, it has to be acknowledged that 'the fullness' or the potential for that 'fullness', was a gift of Yahweh with all the related dangers, opportunities and possibilities.

Now unfulfilled or controlled 'fullness' would inevitably lead to a desire to break out (have freedom) and to spread wings, so vividly exemplified in the escape from captivity some twenty years ago of Goldie the eagle from Regents Park Zoo. How he must have felt and enjoyed that fullness, by escaping from the man-made cage; overcoming that suppressive power of captivity and having the freedom in his own wings. This of course applies to all those who have experienced 'captivity' full or partial; in fact to every human being, even Royalty – after all there is no such thing as unrestricted freedom in life on earth.

When we address ourselves to the issues of race and equality we no doubt have to take into account the limitations and restrictions that are inevitably there. The question is *how* can these be minimized and *who* can make this possible, to make it come about without delay?

I believe this question has to be faced and looked at seriously in the light of the words from the lips of Jesus himself, a black (non-white) person who lived under the political tyranny and suppressive regime of the Romans. ' . . . I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full'. The importance of these words cannot be minimized. Jesus no doubt had life on earth in mind as it is closely related to life after death (cf. Lazarus and Dives). The white members of the Church of England need to look afresh at these words and make sure

that when the time of reckoning comes they may not be found wanting.

In these three papers by James Evans, John Wilkinson and Renate Wilkinson we are perhaps for the first time given on paper evidence of racial injustices and prejudices as they have existed for some thirty years and prevail even today in 1985 in the Church of England. Mr Evans is a black Christian from the USA, while the Wilkinsons are white and have worked intimately, as a parish priest and his wife, with blacks from the Caribbean, gaining very valuable insights especially into their spirituality. They have of course not been able to address themselves to the blacks from the Indian sub-continent. Their experiences in the Church of England are similar but indeed their cultural and religious roots are very different; they are all converts from Hinduism, Islam . . . The authors have used words like: powerlessness; invisibility of the black people; isolation; rejection; double-consciousness; and identity; none or little recognition of cultural contribution; a lack of sensitivity on the part of the whites; black spirituality and institutionalism . . . The list is a long one and by no means abstract. These words, though inadequate, express the true and heart-felt experiences of black Anglicans.

Zacchaeus was united and given 'fullness' – he was integrated but not assimilated. And here there is an acted parable: Jesus went into his house, met his friends and family and ate with them; giving them equality and recognition, the identity they longed for. How many white members of the Church of England have been inside the homes of black Anglicans and eaten their food in their home. Jesus did not wait to be invited. He in fact initiated the whole process. In the Church of England the clock cannot be turned back and now time is running short. But here is a chance to change. It is not to be lost as there may not be another.

The ANGELICAN CHURCH MISSION Mission  
 in  
 The Parish of St. Andrew  
 FOR THE YEAR 1961.

This is to certify that  
Winston Burton  
 is a Registered Communicant Member of the  
 Church of England in Jamaica,  
 We commend him to  
 the care of our  
 Church in England. J. McNab

CLERGY  
 THE REV. E. B. RODGERS, J.P.  
 THE REV. D. I. McNAB

DEACONESSES.  
 DEACONESS SNOW  
 DEACONESS HURFORD

The above card is an example of the way in which a church in the Caribbean, in this case Jamaica, would refer its members to the care of the Church of England. Note the term 'Church of England in Jamaica', and the commendation to 'the care of our Church in England'.

# INHERITORS TOGETHER

**A study of Black Anglicans in relation to white from  
slavery times to contemporary Birmingham**

**JOHN WILKINSON**

(This article is based on 'Black Anglicans in Birmingham – the response of the Diocese of Birmingham to the arrival of Anglicans from the West Indies, 1950 to 1980' which was submitted to St George's House, Windsor for the Clergy Mid-Service Course, January 1984. It forms an introduction to 'A Chance to Change' the article which follows).

'We are members of the Body of Christ: we are children of the same heavenly Father; we are inheritors together of the Kingdom God.'  
(Baptism Service, *Alternative Service book* 1981).

Common spiritual citizenship is the obvious starting-point for Christians of different races or cultures seeking to understand the relationship between them. This is more so if they are of the same denomination (as with black and white Anglicans) and share a common tradition of sacramental and liturgical practice. Black and white Anglicans in Britain share a common language – but the bonds of culture and history which hold them together are ambiguous.

These bonds are ambiguous in the secular realm. West Indians arrived in Britain with British passports and British citizenship – yet they have been obliged to re-purchase that status. Most black Britons now hold the same passport as whites, yet the rights, privileges and security it promises are not always honoured. The situation in the Church of England is parallel. Black Anglicans arriving during the period of West Indian immigration usually carried another 'passport', namely, a letter of commendation from their parish priest at home, or Baptismal, Confirmation and Church membership certificates. They brought the heritage of prayer, Bible and Sacrament which these represented. The church 'passport' also has been widely dishonoured.

The history of the relationship between black and white is such that the Church of England must now learn to recognise the distinctiveness of the black identity. This involves recognising the distinctive experience of black people living in Britain, and the independent black-led social institutions (especially churches) which they have fashioned. These institutions are space in which to 'breathe free', to *be*, independent of white domination. Some progress has certainly been made in recognising the black identity and experience outside the confines of the Church of England. For example, in the area of social responsibility. Anglican bishops have been in the forefront of opposition to the Nationality Act, whilst General Synod has committed funds (though with inadequate response from the dioceses) to the Community and Race Relations Unit of the British Council of Churches. In the ecumenical field the presence and the mission of the new black-led denominations is increasingly recognised.

The urgent task now is to recognise the black identity and experience within the Church of England itself – at the altar, in ministry, in theology – and that task involves an understanding of our common inheritance and history as black and white Anglicans.

### **1. Black and Anglican in Slavery and Colonial Times**

The history of the relationship of white to black within British history is one of oppressor to victim. This has also been the history of the relationship within the Church of England. The story begins with the most radical expression of the relationship: *slavery* in its classical British Protestant form, the total denial of the humanity of black people. We shall trace how this period of slavery 'mellowed' into the *colonial* era, when it became possible to affirm the presence and humanity of black people and even to allow them minor office within the Church – but still not to recognize the full dignity of their humanity by affirming their culture and experience. The Church now had a mission to black people: to educate and 'civilize' them. Thus the de-culturing of black people continued in the colonial period.

What was the cause of slavery? Like the rest of Western European Christendom, England inherited a tradition of *race prejudice*. Had not Europe been threatened for a thousand years by Moslem 'black-amoores', the emotional successors of the barbarians who had destroyed the Roman Empire, that Imperium which various later



European monarchs sought to recreate? Peter Fryer, in his monumental *Staying Power, The History of Black People in Britain*, describes how blackness 'traditionally stood for death, baseness, evil, sin and danger'.<sup>1</sup> Above all there was the strong European tradition that the Devil was black (cf. St Jerome: 'born of the Devil we are black'). These mingled with bizarre and fantastic tales of beasts, monsters and sexual prowess. This is the oral *superstition* of racial prejudice. However this alone would scarcely attract Englishmen to capture and enslave Africans, quite the reverse. It was the drive for wealth that led English merchant capitalists to Africa. From this need, planted in the fertile soil of racial prejudice develops *racism* (the *dogma* of racial inferiority). Racism equated black people with animals, 'What', cried one owner, 'those black dogs to be made Christians?'<sup>2</sup> and asked whether ministers would start baptizing horses.

All European nations who took part in colonial expansion from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, took part in the slave trade. since British imperialism by 1700 was already in the ascendant over its main rival, Spain. Britain is the country whose name is most linked with slavery. Britain also profited the most from slavery, and the prosperity of the great ports of London, Bristol and Liverpool, the capital and the market for Birmingham's metal trades, and indeed the capital and the banking institutions which financed the Industrial Revolution all came from slavery.

All denominations in Britain had members who owned or traded in slaves (this includes even Quakers). Since the Church of England was most bound up with the ruling classes, Anglican involvement is deeper, more thorough and longer-lasting than that of other denominations. Spanish and Portuguese (Catholic) slavery at least involved some recognition of the humanity of its victims.<sup>3</sup> Baptism and consequent eternal salvation were regarded as sufficient compensation for loss of freedom. Protestant slavery involved a radical denial and destruction of black people's humanity. Gayraud Wilmore writes:

Black slavery . . . was a deliberate system of cultural and psychological genocide. Every connection with the past was to be obliterated and the slaves were so thoroughly dehumanized and brainwashed that they would forget that he or she had been anything other than Nigger John or Nigger Mandy created by God, as the early slave catechisms taught, 'to make a crop'.<sup>4</sup>

Identity, in short was to be destroyed, and to be replaced by nothing except the identity of 'replaceable tool'.

This state of non-being, as invisibility except as 'necessary implement' was not quite absolute in Anglicanism. Black people are mentioned once in the Book of Common Prayer. The 1662 Preface states:

An office for the Baptism of such as are of Riper Years . . . by the growth of Anabaptism . . . is now become necessary, and may always be useful for the baptising of Natives in our Plantations.

Charles II's 1660 instructions to the Council for Foreign Plantations read in part:

And you are to consider how . . . (slaves) may best be invited the Christian faith and be made capable of being baptised thereunto, it being to the honour of our Crowne and of the Protestant Religion that all persons in any of our Dominions should be taught the knowledge of God and be made acquainted with the mysteries of salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Basically, however, God sailed with the white English, who declined their slaves even the knowledge of that God. Cape Castle, in what is now Ghana, was built in 1664. Even today visitors may inspect the 13 grim dungeons in which slaves awaiting transportation were kept. A grill from the roof of a dungeon leads through to the floor of the chapel.<sup>6</sup> It has been observed that for some African women their first encounter with a Christian symbol was the Bible on the shelf above the bed of the ship's officer who raped them.

For many years very few slaves were baptised, not least because of the widely believed myth that the sacrament conferred freedom. The most the Church could manage was this token attempt to persuade owners to allow baptism, since as Thomas Sherlock, later Bishop of London, wrote in 1727 'Christianity and the embracing of the Gospel does not make the least difference in civil property'.<sup>7</sup> Even as church of the plantocracy, the Anglican Church was in far from good condition. Augier remarks 'The Church of England was a white man's church, but he usually gave it only a nominal allegiance'.<sup>8</sup> As late as 1822 there were only 12 clergy of the established church on the island of Jamaica; bishops were not appointed until 1825.

In 1701 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was founded to minister to the colonists of the West Indies and North America, and to instruct the 'Indians', and Negroes. 'Instruction' or *catechesis* was rarely a successful method. 'The white preacher' said one former

slave, 'just tell us not to steal master's chickens, they never preach the Lord to us'. Planters' hostility, the slaves' poor grasp of English and unwillingness to give time on their precious free day made catechesis a difficult method. Black slaves would not give up the drumming, obeah, myalism and other marks of their African past.<sup>9</sup> At best catechesis is a kind of socialisation into white social order and religious practices, and compared to the denial of black humanity it is a considerable step forward. Codrington's estate in Barbados is the best example of the possibility of this method. In 1710 he left his estate and the slaves to S.P.G. who ran the estate with (as a Barbadian historian remarks) 'the same social order, but new values'.<sup>10</sup> Blacks were included in the missionary work of conversion, and allowed positions of trust and responsibility. These policies aroused opposition from planters *and* from local clergy, the beginning of a struggle of part of the Church against the plantocracy which was not finally resolved until near the end of the nineteenth century. This is one reason why Barbados remains the most Anglican of all islands, indeed of all countries in the world.

In general, the Anglican Church came to accept the spiritual equality of black people; this development marks the transition from slavery to a colonial society. It was a gradual process, beginning well before Emancipation in 1834, and not completed until long afterwards when the Colonial Office forced the old plantocracy to submit to it, in most cases abolishing the planters' legislature. Colonialism did not, however, solve the question of identity; the Church continued to affirm black peoples' cultural inferiority to whites. Although they were now admitted to have souls, their cultural tradition, which is the vessel of their humanity, was as invisible as ever. The Jamaican theologian Noel Erskine describes the enthusiasm with which black people looked to the churches to reorder society after Emancipation, but continues:

The Anglican Church, which was favoured by the establishment, saw their task as a slow process of civilizing black people. It adopted a cautious approach to giving any responsibility to black people . . . who were allowed to 'rise to the humbler positions of lay readers, catechists and, of course, schoolmasters'.<sup>11</sup>

Education was to bridge the gap between Africa and Europe, but did it in such a way that 'education became the guarantee that society would not change'. The Church aimed by education to produce a

black person reconciled to the plantation system. 'The challenge confronting black people was how their new-won freedom could become the means whereby they could regain their human dignity'.<sup>12</sup>

The Evangelical Revival in Europe and the Great Awakening in North America in the eighteenth century were the catalysts which led to the fashioning of Black Christianity. Non-Anglican missionaries were sent out to the West Indies, beginning with the Moravian mission to St Thomas in 1732. These missionaries earned their own living and were not dependent on the goodwill of the planters. Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists followed, and today communities of these denominations exist in all ex-British Caribbean territories.

But the heart of Black Christianity lay not with the teaching of the white missionaries but with the form of Christianity which the slaves fashioned for themselves arising out of their *own* experience and needs. This Black Christianity is the Christian heritage of black people, and it came, beneath the denominational labels, with all black Christians who journeyed from the West Indies to Britain. The Black Church is not to be identified with any single church label. Even Pentecostalism is only one form in which the Black Church presents itself. (In the USA most black Christians are Methodists or Baptists – in separate black denominations). Black Christianity is a living stream of Christian faith, which white Christians have under-valued, indeed often failed to recognise. It is the long and vivid memory of God sustaining the oppressed in 'Egypt' and leading them through the wilderness to freedom.

Black Christianity is 'steal away' Christianity. Black people in slavery fashioned their own Christianity unfettered and spontaneous in the 'catacombs' of the woods at night. Theirs was a distinctive, free, yet orthodox spirituality in which a longing for the future gave hope to the present. Like Paul, the Black Church owes its existence to 'no man' (Galatians 1.11,12), to no white church or missionary, but received it in the Spirit direct from the Lord.

Black Christianity is a baptism of the old religions and cultural traditions of West Africa. These survive strongly among black people and can be found as 'buried treasure' in members of white-led and colonial churches. The creative style and artistry of black worship is essentially the development of this African tradition.

Black Christianity entails two themes, survival and liberation, the former more associated with the hard oppression of slavery in the

American South and the Caribbean, the latter primarily arising out of the free black community of the North.<sup>13</sup> These two traditions are entwined however. They stand as liberating and forgiving judgement to the white Christianity and as resource to the future church.

Interviews with members of my own former congregation gave a vivid picture of Anglican Church life in the West Indies in the late colonial period – and of the Black Christian tradition underlying it. Both Jamaicans and Leeward Islanders described the high level of religious practice, the ‘high’ Anglican tradition, the thriving and organised church life – and the place for unofficial and personal religious practice.

In Jamaica the Anglican Church was one among many. It was mainly identified with the upper-class and English people, although it also had members from other classes, especially in the country. Other mainstream churches like Methodist, Prebyterian, Moravian and Catholic were respected and in good relationship with the Anglican Church. The ‘Church of God’ was definitely for poorer people. Church members would attend church every Sunday. Confirmation took place at the age of eleven or twelve, with thorough Catechism teaching as preparation. The Confirmation was a great day, with the girls wearing white dresses and a veil, the boys black suits.

In St Kitt’s, Nevis and Montserrat the society was less religiously pluralist. People were generally either Anglican or Methodist. Both those churches co-operated with each other and respected each other, and each included all classes of society. Anglicans looked down upon the ‘sideways churches’ as people who considered themselves ‘more saved’, and who would pull people out of the Methodist and Anglican Church. Church attendance each Sunday was again common, but with a more ‘high church’ liturgy than in Jamaica. People were expected to receive Holy Communion regularly, but only once a month, and would be challenged by the priest if they became irregular. They would not go out the night before taking Communion, but prepare themselves for it – often by going to confession – and be formally dressed for the service. The priest was a respected and known figure in both church and community, as a friend, but also as a figure of authority. The church was the focal point not only for the religious life of its members, but also for their social life.

Religious life for both groups extended beyond church services into everyday life. Family prayers were common, and people went

to concerts, week night meetings and services in 'sideways churches' where they would sing the well-known Sankey hymns. These hymns also accompanied funerals which were big occasions, preceded by a wake. Although nearly everyone expressed rejection of the 'excesses' of the Pentecostals (such as continually 'calling out', 'falling on the floor' and their sense of being the only true Christians), there was a clear area of continuity with the black Christianity of the early nineteenth century and the exile from Africa behind it. Appreciation of the commanding voice of black preachers . . . , 'feeling the Spirit' during loud corporate singing, the role of 'Sankey' and the familiarity with extempore prayer, as well as funeral customs and a close relationship to spiritual things, all these constitute the outward signs of an inner black spirituality which in the West Indies had more or less successfully focused around the liturgy of the Anglican Church.

## **2. Black and Anglican in Birmingham**

The experience of West Indians on arrival in England has been recorded in several studies. Rex and Moore in their 1967 classic study *Race Community and Conflict* describe the situation in Sparkbrook, Birmingham. They tell of the experience of starting at the bottom of the heap, of the overt racism and the factors which brought about the multi-occupation of the larger late-Victorian terrace houses. A deeper shock than all this, however, was the fundamental shattering of illusions. Rex and Moore recorded:

We have found no evidence that West Indians arrived in this country with a chip on the shoulder. Rather they came expecting acceptance, and were shocked and grieved to find they did not have the same rights as other citizens.

Of one conversation with a West Indian couple they record:

A central theme was about the brain-washing of West Indians at home about Britain. They had been told about the Queen and Parliament, but no one had told them there was a colour bar. They had thought they could get a flat where they chose, and that Frank could get a job like any other carpenter.<sup>14</sup>

Little has been recorded, however, about the reception Anglicans from the West Indies had when they first went to church on arrival in

England. The following accounts of people I know personally give us an idea of what it was like.

On my first Sunday in Birmingham my friends and I, we put on our best suits and went to the church. But after the service the vicar told us not to come again. His congregation wouldn't like it, he said.

I went to church. After the service I shook hands with the vicar and gave him the letter of recommendation from my parish priest at home. We chatted for a while. When I came back the next Sunday he completely ignored me, and never spoke to me again. I stopped going soon after.

I was the only black person in the church. Nobody spoke to me. it was dreadful. I wrote to my mother and said, I'm not going there again. When my mother wrote back she said, if you don't go to Mass on Sunday, you are not my daughter anymore.

The first year they ignored you, the second year they ignored you, the third year they asked you to buy a raffle ticket.

The day after I arrived I went to church to pray. There was nobody else in the building. But when I came out I saw a lady working in the garden. I thought she was the verger. She asked me who I was and where I lived. She was really interested in me. The next day I had a postcard inviting me to an evening in the vicarage. I met a number of fellow-countrymen there. We had a good time. I've been a member of this church ever since.

Reflected in these accounts are the attitudes and actions of individual members of the indigenous congregations. But what was the response of the institution?

There are two levels of institutional response to be considered: one, the response of the local churches, the other the response of the church at diocesan level. Anglican immigrants to Birmingham encountered their church at its weakest, namely in the churches of the inner city which had been subjected to radical social change, and were in a state of rapid decline. Clergy and laity were therefore insecure, uncertain and defensive. This made them hold onto the power and authority that was still in their hands. They were unable to share it with the newcomers, as reflected in the small number of black church members who were elected onto PCCs, made church-wardens or were given responsibility for the organisation of social events in the church.

At diocesan level Bishop Leonard Wilson was the first bishop in England to appoint a 'Chaplain for Overseas People' in 1959. At that

time there already existed in the city the 'Liaison Committee for Coloured People', whose chairman was the Archdeacon of Birmingham, the Venerable S. Harvie-Clark. He had brought together prominent citizens of goodwill and, not so successfully, leaders of the immigrant community. The objective of the committee was to tackle the problems and difficulties encountered in trying to 'integrate' the newcomers. The committee had no official status and received no financial support from the churches. Its only asset was the influence of its members with city and other officials. No wonder it was unable to tackle effectively the immigrants' problems in housing, employment, social security and the ever-present racism of the host community.

The appointment of the Bishop's 'Chaplain for Overseas People' took place quite separately from the work of that committee. As far as there were guidelines for this job, they did not link into the 'Social Responsibility' agenda of the committee's work of integrating the immigrants into society, but had as their aim the integration of Anglican immigrants into the church. The chaplain was told 'show them the love of God . . .', and 'they must be brought into church life'.

This was easier said than done. Paul Burrough, the chaplain, developed a very close pastoral relationship with many West Indian Anglican families. From September 1959 until his marriage in 1962 Paul Burrough lived in a caravan which he moved to a new inner city parish every 28 days. For most of the time in each parish he made contacts, visited, did basic pastoral work, and on the last Sunday would invite all his new flock to the parish church to a Eucharist celebrated according to the liturgy of the Anglican Province of the West Indies. He became a trusted confidant, a counsellor, a support in time of trouble and a link with the Church in the West Indies, (which he visited in 1961). What one person wrote to him, from prison, is typical of many letters he received, 'May God bless you and keep you healthy . . . you have been a great helper in all my trouble and that I will never forget'. Even today his ministry is remembered with great affection.

Several clergy were very co-operative and sympathetic, some lay people were welcoming, and in one or two places black people became church officers. But the structured growth of black Christian life took place in the rapidly growing black-led churches. The Church of England largely failed to take Paul Burrough's work into its structures. As an outsider the chaplain could only be effective in a



parish if he was welcomed by the vicar and congregation. And in any case one person could not effect changes in so many places at once. It was difficult too, to adjust parish structures to the new situation. Many priests did not easily understand what was going on, others could not cope with the extra demands the situation made on them.

Paul Burrough's successors took Community Relations work largely into other directions. Perhaps without thinking, the diocese allowed his work to remain unfinished. An exception was the work of Mrs Monica Savage (1969-73). Like Paul Burrough she received no real job description, and felt she was appointed almost without anyone in the diocese knowing! Little attempt was made from above at facilitating co-operation between Mrs Savage and the local clergy so she received little support from the clergy, was appalled at the racism that white church people displayed quite openly, and felt that the church as a whole was absolving itself of its responsibility towards its black members by employing one or two people to work in the race relations field. She resigned after three years, but not without urging the Bishop to work out a strategy for his multi-racial diocese, because, she warned him, the situation 'carries with it such an alarming potential for evil as well as good'.

The following features of this history stand out most clearly. Many West Indian immigrants had been Anglicans back home, and had expected that in England they would be welcomed readily into the 'mother church'. Instead the newcomers were seen as 'dark strangers', not as fellow members of the world-wide Anglican communion.

Church people, like other citizens, had racist attitudes and displayed racist behaviour. In a situation of decline and weakness, the indigenous congregations were unable to make the newcomers part of their fellowship. How rare welcoming attitudes and actions were is shown through the intensity of feeling with which they are remembered and retold thirty years later.

Where a welcome was extended, the church took a new lease of life and began a new chapter of its history. But sadly such instances of positive response remain fragmented. The diocesan authorities have certainly encouraged them as individual developments but have not co-ordinated them. With a more concerted effort their momentum could have been increased, and their effectiveness extended beyond the individual parish. Most important, a conceptual and theological understanding of what was happening might have

prevented the marginalisation of black people in the Church which 'A Chance to Change' reveals.

### **3. Black and Anglican in one Particular Parish**

We have seen how Black Christianity originated as the black response to the oppression of slavery, and examined its co-existence with the Church of the colonial period. We have seen how this co-existence largely collapsed when the illusion of the black colonial identity was shattered by immigration to Britain – with the resulting marginalisation of the black people who remained in the Anglican Church. Nevertheless even this process meant new life for several inner ring congregations, and the establishment of a 'new black presence' in the Church of England. I have examined the process by which this happened in several parishes. I will outline the story of the parish I know best, a parish in which I served as one of the clergy from 1974 to 1984.

The two decades before the arrival of the new clergy team, together with three committed lay people, had been a time of first slow and then rapid decline of the parish congregational life. Church organisations closed one by one, as increasing numbers of church members either joined the 'white flight' to the suburbs, or were compulsorily rehoused elsewhere when a section of the parish was demolished. In the four years 1964-1968 church income and the parish magazine circulation both halved, and by 1970 it was difficult to find a candidate for the office of churchwarden – or even to keep the choir in order. It was also the period when, despite the large number of black baptisms and weddings and the first black confirmations, the failure to welcome and incorporate black people took place. The story of a once thriving church declining in (as many felt) a very few years to the pitiful state where it could not maintain or manage its buildings or pay its way is a sad and moving one, very painful and bewildering to live through. The tenacity and devotion of those, both black and white, who survived it, is greatly to be admired, as are the efforts of individuals who never gave up the struggle to live in fellowship with the other race – among whom the incumbent of the time, my predecessor, is to be numbered.

The new clergy team appointed in 1974 were unaware of the heritage they were to have the privilege of harvesting. Behind the faithfulness of their predecessor, the ministry of Paul Burrough, and that of the Anglican church in the West Indies, lay the whole black

Christian tradition. From the clergy and from members of the congregation, came a number of initiatives – the re-forming of the choir by some black young people, the introduction of a Parish Communion, the starting of a Junior Church and a Youth Fellowship. But it was the tragic death of a single parent of four children which brought the first vivid encounter with the Black Christian tradition. The funeral was a great black community occasion and the starting point for many black future members of the congregation.

As a new mainly black congregation rapidly came into being, and organisational and pastoral structures were developed, as the first steps in community outreach and the replacement of the church building were taken, I had little conceptual grasp of the history or content of the Black Christianity. Naively, I believed that the replacement of fear and the rejection of black people by welcome and fellowship would lead to the formation of a congregation whose life would then not be particularly different from a white one. And so it seemed for most of those first four years, a time of growth, consolidation and structuring. By 1979, however, I was being forced to reckon with indications of the cultural difference between white and black Anglicans, the spiritual expression of that difference and its grounding in the ongoing historical relationship of white to black, namely oppressor to victim. Some indications were very positive: the power and articulateness of the black tradition of free prayer, the black style of singing revealed in certain hymns in particular, the warmth and openness of black community and family celebrations and observances (as around Baptism and birthdays, or around sickness and death), the quality of love and forgiveness for me and my family in the context both of my own personal mistakes and of the continued experience of white racism in wider society – the sheer faith and openness to God of Afro-Caribbean Christians.

Some indications were disturbing however: some young people, apparently settled in church life, left not only church but home as well to become Rastafarians at the age of sixteen. Black parents pressed the clergy to 'do youth work', but seemed to differ from their children as to what the priorities and content of that work should be. With one or two exceptions responsibility and leadership were taken up only slowly. Even the happy emergence of the black tradition more openly in the life of the church served to demonstrate how much its spiritual riches had been suppressed and stifled. There were occasions on which it was necessary to challenge conservative

aspects of the theology of older members in the interests of responding to problems and questions raised by some younger people.

#### **4. Black and Anglican in the Future?**

How could we respond to this situation? It took only a little reflection to reveal how the Church had failed to understand the distinctive identity of its new black members. At every level resources and conceptual understanding were lacking. For example appropriate junior church material did not exist. Musicians able to co-ordinate and lead the yearning of many black youngsters to praise God in a black musical tradition could not be found. The basic lack however was of black Christian community and theology. Black Anglicans had not come together to 'name' themselves, to acknowledge each other as a historic community of faith with a distinctive experience and distinctive resources. Therefore there could be no articulation of an appropriate theology – to my knowledge nowhere in Britain is it yet possible for non-Pentecostal black Christians to study theology on the basis of a black identity. Black Christianity is lived and the black identity is confirmed daily in the life and resources of the black community, and by their ongoing experience of white racism. But without a selfconscious community and a theology arising out of it, how can Black Anglicans have a future? It is not surprising that Black Anglicans in Britain have produced so few candidates for full-time ministry.

At last there are signs of change. My own former parish employs a 'church neighbourhood worker', in an 'interim ministry' post where training appropriate to local needs can be devised, and experience of full-time ministry be given which does not (at this stage) involve the life-long commitment of ordained ministry. A national Association of Black Clergy exists, which has sponsored the popular 'Young, Gifted and Black' weekend conferences on vocation. The Church of England has its first black Bishop. Some dioceses have officers concerned, at least in part, with the aspirations of black members of the Church. The Leicester Report *The Church of England and Racism*<sup>16</sup> has stimulated thought – not least in Birmingham where the Race Relations Group of the Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility has recently devised a comprehensive Anti-Racist Strategy and Equal Opportunity Policy by which the Church could seek to refashion its life. Much of my time during the last year has been spent in

conversation with committed black Anglicans, many of them young adults. This research will, I think, give valuable evidence of the desire of many to grow as Christians on the basis of a black identity. The task now is to create the space and the resources within the mainstream structures of the Church of England for that to happen.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. Pluto Press London 1984, p.135.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.146.
- <sup>3</sup> cf. Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery, A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition 1968, pp. 72-80.
- <sup>4</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, 'Identity Crisis: Blacks in Predominantly White denominations', in William Howard, ed. *Colloquium on Black Religion*, Reformed Church in America, New York 1976, p.5.
- <sup>5</sup> Cited in Albert J. Robateau: *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*. OUP, New York, 1978, p.97.
- <sup>6</sup> David Jenkins, *Black Zion: The Return of Afro-Americans and West Indians to Africa*. Wildwood House, London 1975, p.129.
- <sup>7</sup> Cited in Fryer, *Staying Power*, p.146.
- <sup>8</sup> Augier, Gordon, Hall and Reckord, *The Making of the West Indies*. Longmans, 1960.
- <sup>9</sup> Noel L. Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective*. Orbis Books, New York, 1981, p.31.
- <sup>10</sup> F. A. Hoyos, *Barbados: A history from the Amerindians to Independence*. Macmillan Caribbean, 1978.
- <sup>11</sup> Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology*, p.71.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.72.
- <sup>13</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope*. Geneva Press, Philadelphia, 1983, pp.46-49.
- <sup>14</sup> John Rex and Robert Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict*. OUP, 1967, p.157.

# **A CHANCE TO CHANGE**

**A sociological study of the relationship between black Anglicans and the Church of England in the Diocese of Birmingham in 1983.**

**RENATE WILKINSON**

(This article is part of a thesis submitted to the University of Aston in Birmingham in July 1984.)

## **I. Introduction**

The motivation for doing the research reported on below came out of the work of the Birmingham Diocesan Race Relations Group, a subgroup of the Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility.

In 1981, as a response to an initiative of the World Council of Churches concerning race and the Church, the Board for Social Responsibility of the Church of England set up a consultation on 'The Church of England and Racism'. Shortly afterwards a report on the consultation, known as the Leicester Report, was published. This report challenges the Church of England to recognize and deal with the racism that results from its structures and the processes at work in them. It looks, among other things, at employment and representation of black people in church bodies and church government; at the recruitment and training of black clergy, training in theological colleges, ethnic minorities and church schools, ending with a number of recommendations or 'guidelines for action by the Church, nationally and locally, in the next decade'.

At the initiative of the Diocesan Race Relations Group, the Birmingham Diocesan Synod, in June 1983, received the Leicester Report and commended it to the parishes and deaneries for study and action as appropriate. Encouraged by that commendation the DRRG set itself the task to work towards an implementation of the recommendations of the Leicester Report in the Birmingham Diocese. It was felt that in order for this task to be done the group needed a sound knowledge of the black Anglicans in the diocese and their relationship to the church. The aim of my research was to provide that knowledge.

The data presented here in summary form, was collected by way of a postal questionnaire sent to all incumbents in the diocese, a copy of which can be found at the end of this paper. The stories were

collected through interviews with black clergy and lay people, and with (white) clergy in multiracial congregations.

The methodology on which the study is based is an appropriation of works by two social scientists, G. Myrdal and W. G. Runciman. Runciman, in the first volume of his *The Methodology of Social Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), delineates the task of describing 'social facts', as opposed to 'natural facts' which are the subject of the natural sciences. The description of social facts, he says, require an additional level of understanding. It is not only an account of what is going on and why. The sociologist also wants to give an idea of what it is like to be a participant in a given situation. He or she therefore needs to understand the meaning that human beings give to their own actions and behaviour. The stories included in this paper enable such understanding.

Myrdal's classic study of the situation of black Americans in the USA in the 1940s (*An American Dilemma* McGraw-Hill, 1964), confronted the American people with the discrepancy between that professed creed that all citizens are equal before the law and the reality of life for black citizens in that country. Likewise the Church of England is challenged by the discrepancy between her professed creed that 'all are one in Christ Jesus' and the reality of life for black members of the institution. Myrdal's study was therefore instrumental in pointing me in the direction my own research followed.

Regrettably the literature on religion and race in Britain is sparse. Sociological studies of race relations in this country pay little attention to the role of the Church in the community. The Sociology of Religion has neglected the subject too, with the exception of one or two studies of the black-led churches. Works of theology mention race, if at all, in footnotes only. Most serious literature in this field comes from the United States of America. My research was especially informed by the work of Gayraud Wilmore, a black Professor of Theology and a member of the Presbyterian Church. His book *Black and Presbyterian* provided me with some of the conceptual tools I needed to understand the faith of black Christians. Wilmore uses the term 'Black Christianity' and gives in its definition a description of the contribution black Christians make to the Church. The following are some of the characteristics of 'Black Christianity': the desire for liberty; the image of Africa as the land of origin; the recognition of the will of God for social justice; a creative style and artistry of worship; a sense of unity of the secular and the

sacred. Naming 'Black Christianity' is providing an essential counter-weight to the 'problem' aspect under which black people are regarded by both Church and society.

Within Britain important insights can be gained from literature on transracial adoptions. I used an article by John Small, director of the black adoption agency 'New Black Families'. Small stresses the necessity for the black adopted child to develop a positive black identity, and ways in which white adoptive parents can and must facilitate this process. A parallel can be drawn between the black child in a white adoptive family and black members in a white-led church, whilst at the same time recognising, of course, that the relationship between black and white within the church is that between adult to adult, not child to parent.

As I said earlier, the thesis from which this paper is taken was completed in the summer of 1984. Since then it has been made available to the Church in the diocese and further afield. The fact that at least 7 per cent of all regularly worshipping Anglicans in the Diocese of Birmingham are black has been noted with surprise. This to me underlines the validity of the notion that within the Church black members are an 'invisible people'.

Judging by the response I have so far had to the findings of my research, members of the Church find it difficult to accept that an institution like the Church of England, because of its history and its place in present-day society, disadvantages black people in situations where no personal or intentional racism is involved. Until white Christians accept the reality of this institutional racism, they will not recognise the need for structural changes that would give greater equality to black members within the Church.

Lastly, my suggestions for 'positive action' have been criticised as being 'discrimination in reverse'. I would like to stress that any 'positive action' the Church undertakes is but a part of giving back to our black brothers and sisters that which for so long has been taken from them. There can be no justice without restitution, and without justice there can be no reconciliation.

## **II. Questionnaire Results**

135 churches answered the questionnaire, a response rate of 75 per cent. The following figures are based on the information given by those churches. It treats the 135 churches *as if* they were the total of Anglican churches in the Diocese.



### 1. NUMBERS ON THE ELECTORAL ROLL

64 churches or 47 per cent have black members on the Electoral Roll, 747 out of 7109 members are black, nearly 10 per cent.

### 2. SUNDAY ATTENDANCE

89 churches have black people attending regularly. There are black Anglicans attending churches in every deanery in the Diocese. In 20 per cent of churches with mixed congregations black people make up more than a quarter of the congregation.

6 churches have a majority black congregation.

14288 adults regularly attend an Anglican church in this Diocese. Out of these 1023 or 7 per cent are black.

Taking the total of regular attenders in mixed congregations, 12 per cent of these are black.

Of white members of the Electoral Roll, 3 per cent attended church regularly.

Twice as many black people attend regularly as are on the Electoral Roll, 200 per cent.

10 per cent of churches have more white parishioners attending than are on the Electoral Roll.

43 per cent of churches have more black parishioners attending than are on the Electoral Roll.

80 per cent of churches have members who live outside the parish and not in easy walking distance from the church.

Out of the churches with mixed congregations 33 per cent have black attenders living outside the parish at a considerable distance.

### 3. SUNDAY SCHOOL/JUNIOR CHURCH

Out of 135 churches, 104 have a Sunday School or Junior Church. 34 of them, or one third, have only white children in Sunday School. 19 churches have mixed adult congregations, but no black children in Sunday School.

The total regular Sunday School attendance is 4857. The 455 black children attending form 9 per cent of the total, or 16 per cent of the children attending mixed Sunday School.

In 9 Sunday Schools black children form the majority. In 49 they are a small minority. 40 per cent of children attend all white Sunday Schools. 60 per cent attend mixed Sunday Schools.

#### 4. SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

70 churches have black children attending Sunday School.

14 churches have black Sunday School teachers.

Black Sunday School teachers make up 7 per cent of all teachers in mixed Sunday Schools.

The ratio of teacher to children is 1:6. The ratio of black teachers to black children is 1:15.

#### 5. BAPTISMS

63 churches had black people (children or adults) among those baptised 7 per cent of all baptisms.

In 11 churches more than half the people baptised were black.

#### 6. WEDDINGS

43 churches had weddings of black people, 3 per cent of the total figure of weddings.

#### 7. REPRESENTATION OF CARIBBEAN ISLANDS

In 19 churches Jamaicans are the largest group within the black congregation, in 9 churches Leeward Islanders, in 5 churches Barbadians.

#### 8. COMPOSITION OF THE GENERAL POPULATION OF THE PARISH

In 114 parishes white people are the majority.

In 14 parishes white people are a sizeable minority.

In 9 parishes Asians are in the majority.

In 37 parishes they are a sizeable minority.

In no parishes are Afro-Caribbeans in the majority.

In 50 parishes they are a sizeable minority.

#### 9. REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

16 churches have black *church wardens*: 14 have one black, one white: two have two black wardens.

Of the 89 churches with mixed congregations, 47 have no black *members on the PCC*.

6 churches have a majority black congregation.

3 churches have a majority black PCC.

There is one black *stipendiary minister* in the Diocese.

74 churches have white *non-stipendiary ministers* (NSMs, Readers, Elders).

5 churches have black non-stipendiary ministers.  
4 churches have a black treasurer.  
None has a black PCC Secretary or Vice-chairman.

#### 10. TRAINING

From this Diocese there is no-one black training for the stipendiary ministry.

One black person is training for the non-stipendiary ministry.  
There are two people training to be Readers.

#### 11. PAID EMPLOYEES OF THE LOCAL PARISHES

Out of 41 vergers employed by local churches 1 is black.

Out of 7 organists 2 are black.

Out of 13 youth leaders 2 are black.

Out of 80 cleaners 8 are black.

Out of 45 secretaries 1 is black.

#### 12. SIDESMEN/WOMEN AND SERVERS

40 churches have black members doing sidesmen/women duties.

23 churches have a total of 59 black servers. This figure represents a group of young black people with a special commitment to the church.

#### 13. REPRESENTATION OUTSIDE THE PARISH

Out of a total of 135 lay representatives on the Diocesan Synod 2 are black. 10 churches have black representatives on the Deanery Synod.

#### 14. BLACK MEMBERSHIP IN ORGANISATIONS

(CHURCH ORGANISATIONS RUN BY AND FOR CHURCH MEMBERS)

89 churches have black regular attenders.

771 churches have black people as members of church organisations.

The organisations most frequently mentioned as having black members are: Choirs, Bible Study Groups and Prayer Groups. Much less frequently mentioned are housegroups, Mothers' Union and Women's Fellowship. Several churches with black members in Prayer Groups and Bible Study groups have no black members in the Mothers' Union or Women's Fellowship.

Of church organisations for young people the uniformed organisations have most frequently got black members.

#### 15. COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS (RUN BY THE CHURCH FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY)

Out of the 135 churches which participated in the survey, 106 run Community Organisations.

Out of the 106 churches 60 have black members in these organisation, 46 have no black members in their community organisations.

These organisations cater mainly for children and young people and include Playgroups, Holiday Playschemes and Youth Clubs.

In some parishes these community organisations form a link with the Asian population.

#### 16. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

At the end of the questionnaire there was a request to list 'any other contributions black members make to the life of your church'.

The answers, though few, range over a wide spectrum of contributions, from the church team to the ministry of healing. Three quotations may stand for the rest.

'Many of the youngest members of the church are from the Caribbean and inject a sense of fun in worship, learning and play which is good, not only for the other children, but for the congregation as a whole'.

'Their main contribution is that they are about 50 per cent of "us", and 50 per cent of those worshipping God in our fellowship'.

'Much of the future of this church lies in the black community'.

There then followed two open questions. The first: Are there any particular issues that have arisen through the presence of black people in your congregation?

Again a few representative quotations.

'We do not think of our congregation as "white" and "coloured".'

'In the past (still remembered) there was racial tension in church. . . I am not aware of any such tension now.'

'They do not like to be thought of as different and therefore do not raise issues like immigration or black youth unemployment.'

'Nationality and immigration, racism in church and society, police/community relations.'

'Attempts to break down social inhibitions between white and black members have been broadly unsuccessful over the past 10-15 years. More recently barriers are breaking down and we function more as one rather than two congregations now than ever before.'

'We need to do much more work on identifying and using black members' particular gifts and abilities.'

'One of our Caribbean members died and her funeral was a revelation for all of us because it revealed (a) the close knit nature of Caribbean families, (b) a richness of worship undreamt of by the rest of us.'

'We are still facing the problem of involving black members more in the decision-making processes of our church, as well as in groups such as the catering committee which have been run by the same few white people for decades.'

'It is not easy for the black member on the PCC to find his niche.'

'One of our black members, . . . one of our few professional people, has just agreed to take on . . . after years of avoiding any sort of office through anxiety about his blackness and our response.'

The second open question was, 'Have there been any significant changes in (a) the size, (b) the social and ethnic make-up of the congregation during the last ten years?'

A considerable number of churches that are growing, even if slowly, attribute this growth to black people having joined over the last ten years. One incumbent writes, 'It is my considered opinion that our church would cease to be a viable parish church without the "black presence" in the congregation'.

And, 'The percentage of Afro-Caribbean people in our congregation is nearly 500 per cent greater than the percentage of Afro-Caribbean people in the parish!'

Some parishes have had black people moving in only fairly recently.

Some parishes in the inner-city have undergone a considerable change during the last ten years during which Asian people have become a majority of the population.

#### SUMMARY

The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Birmingham has a sizeable number of black adults among its members and regular attenders.

The figures are comparable to those of one of the major Pentecostal Churches in the city.

The number of black children in Anglican Sunday Schools is lower (about 50 per cent) than the equivalent number of children in the Pentecostal Church.

Black Anglicans worship regularly in at least 89 churches of the Diocese. Every Deanery has churches with black members.

In 15 per cent of churches black members form between 40 per cent and 85 per cent of the congregation. But in most churches they are a small minority.

Few black Anglicans participate in the spiritual leadership (ordained or otherwise) of their church or in its teaching ministry.

Black Anglicans are under-represented on the decision-making councils of the church. This is the case at parish level, but even more so at diocesan level.

Few black people hold paid jobs in local churches.

Black adult members do not participate fully in the organisational life of their church.

But many churches are in contact with young black people through their community organisations.

### **III. How Has this Situation Come About?**

On one of the questionnaires the following comment was made, 'The Black members still tend to sit near the back of church . . . they are reluctant to accept leadership roles or responsibilities.' Why is this so?

White people tend to look for an answer to this question in black people or in the black community. Yet in black-led churches black people are in positions of leadership and do take responsibility. That leads me to conclude that the answer must lie somewhere else.

In my judgment the two forces which have brought about the present situation are personal and institutional racism.

It is argued that attitudes about race have changed over the last thirty years and that the crude racism of the early days of immigration no longer exists. When black people are not content with a subordinate position in 'white' institutions, though they do experience racism still. It may be a more subtle form of racism, but it achieves the same result.

The Christian belief in the unity of all believers in Christ is, within each Christian, in conflict with the values and attitudes of society, of his or her class or other social group. The life of the Church is shaped by that conflict and by the ongoing struggle to fashion the institution more closely after the vision on which it is founded.

Several respondents to the questionnaire made comments like, 'Black or White, I treat them all the same'. The figures above show, however, that even when Black and White are treated the same, the outcome is not equality but inequality. How can that be?

The Church is an institution steeped in the history of Western Europe. It is part of white society. Its organisational structures, its system of education and training, its processes of decision-making

and its models of leadership have evolved within the context of Western European culture. The formulation of its doctrines in the past and the interpretation given in the present are expressions of Western European thought.

Black people's understanding of God, of themselves and of the world have been shaped, at least in part, by other traditions. In order to do them justice, the church cannot just 'treat them all the same'.

The relationship between Black and White in the Church today is shaped by the history of slavery and colonialism, and by the Church's understanding and practise of mission on the one hand – and on the other hand by the position of the black community in British society today. In that situation 'equality of opportunity' does not achieve 'equality of outcome'.

## **Black Christians in a White Church**

### STORIES OF BLACK CHRISTIANS

#### *The First Story*

'My father was brought up as an Anglican in the West Indies, my mother as a Moravian.

'When we moved to Erdington, we joined the Methodist Church, because we did not know that there was an Anglican Church quite nearby.

'Then a tragic death happened in another part of our family. the funeral was held at St James (Aston). At the funeral I met relatives I had not seen for years, and others who I had never met before. This event brought the family together, and we all started to go (or to go back) to St James. I was confirmed soon after that, at the age of twenty. Not much later I became a Sunday School teacher.

'Even though I live a long way from Aston, I still go to St James. When I go to church I am with my family and with my community. The church is part of that. When I first left home and lived in a flat of my own my vicar informed the priest of the parish I moved to. but nobody ever contacted me. Even though I lived quite near to the church, I never heard anything from them. There weren't even any posters up during Christian Aid Week. Ministers could do much more in welcoming people to their churches.

'Many black people don't join another church when they move because they don't want to risk being rejected. It wasn't till I went to the "Young, Gifted and Black" conference (a conference organised by the Association of Black Clergy to foster vocations among young

black people; it was held in September 1983 at Holy Trinity Church, Birchfield, under the leadership of Barry Thorley, who was then vicar of Holy Trinity) that I realized how cosy St James is, and how isolated some black people are in their churches. Black people feel this isolation in many ways. That's why they feel a need to get together very strongly. Black social workers, black teachers etc. are doing just the same. White people always have that support around them, but black people don't. And yet white people object to us "getting together", they call it discrimination in reverse.

'I like the Anglican service. There is lots of opportunity for participation in it. You feel you are doing something, not that somebody is doing it all for you.

'I have never wanted to join a Pentecostal church. I do feel drawn by their music, but their teaching is too rigid. But I know that a lot of young black people identify with the black ministers in Pentecostal churches. I myself don't mind whether the priest is black or white, but I know that for a lot of young people it does make a difference. Colour does matter as long as it is a hindrance to equality. We want to be recognized as black, and we want to have full rights.

'The older generation is quite happy to see the priest run the church. But young people want to have responsibility. They don't see white people as always superior, quite the reverse. They feel they have to prove that they can do it and they can do it.

'The church should do something positive for black people. Only that will make up for the discrimination they have experienced so far. And it should encourage vocations among black people.'

### *The Second Story*

'I was christened Church of England back home. I came to Birmingham when I was about five or six (mid-1960s). We lived just around the corner from St Silas Church where I went to Sunday School from very early on. I loved going because the teachers were very caring. It was a multi-racial Sunday School, but the teachers were all white. I didn't think of myself as black then.

'That came later, when I was older and joined the choir. I noticed then that I was the only black person in the choir. All people in authority at the church were white.

'I became very attached to one of the churchwardens who showed great interest not only in my spiritual but also in my academic progress.

'He was an evangelical who had fought hard in his life. As a child



he had a bone disease. He had also worked hard and had success in building up his own factory. He always stressed what it means to have God in your life. I felt that his care for me was due to his Christian commitment.

‘When I was in my mid-teens I became aware of racism through name-calling and things like that. But through my experiences at church I knew that there was unity in Christ.

‘I can remember feeling proud that the churchwarden valued me like that. I used to go to his house in Handsworth Wood a lot, to help him in the garden and things like that. I can remember feeling people looking from behind their curtains as I walked through the streets.

‘My friend used to say, “No matter what colour you are, you have to work hard in life”. But he was sensitive to the problems of black people. He used to say “You’ll be the first black churchwarden at this church”. I used to help him giving out hymn-books and so on.

‘I was very sad when he died. I wanted him to see me achieve things.

‘My family then moved to Great Barr. It was difficult to travel back to church from there without a car. So I went and looked for a church nearer home. I felt most at home at the Evangelical church. The service was informal, and people showed a personal interest in me. This church was mainly white, but that didn’t matter. What matters is that you don’t just proclaim from the pulpit that everyone is welcome, but that you actually do it.

‘In 1977 I went to college. At that time I turned my back on the church completely. I had a growing black consciousness which was made very acute in Leicester where the National Front was very strong and active.

‘On my first Saturday there I went on a march against racism. About three-quarters of the way through I remember a very tall, big white man shouting the most insulting racial abuse. That was a shock to me. Holte School had been a relatively protected environment.

‘This experience was reinforced by constant attacks on friends of mine, by the racist graffiti around the Polytechnic, by frequent incidents when I walked home late at night and had abuse hurled at me and things thrown at me from passing cars.

‘It made me aware of the fact that racism was a very real thing. I belonged to the Afro-Caribbean society at the Polytechnic. It was at that time that I started thinking, “If there is a God, why does he let

this happen?" I tried to reconcile my Christian belief with all that was happening.

'What really severed my links with the church was two things. My friend was attacked at our front door, so badly that he needed to have stitches. Also, the president of the Afro-Caribbean Society was attacked in the centre of town. Then there was an anti-racist march and the Bishop of Leicester took part. I was impressed, but somehow it didn't seem enough. The church was never represented at these marches in any significant way.

'I didn't abandon my belief in God, but this God was a white God so to speak.

'One day in 1980 I met the sister of a friend. She told me she was a Christian. I asked her all the difficult questions I had asked people in the past. She answered them in a new way. I was impressed, especially since she was Pentecostal. I wouldn't go near them at that time.

'The next Sunday I went to her church. An Asian minister was preaching. I was moved, but I thought that was just an emotional response to the service. Back at home I locked myself in my bedroom to think. I decided to go back in the evening. Near the end of the service when the altar call came I went up. I went up to challenge God. I said to him, "Look, all these people here say you are real, prove it to me now". From that I felt such a mighty presence, I knew I had come face to face with God. I said the words of a hymn that came into my mind, "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee". I said these words and that was it.

'I told my mother the next day. "I've got saved", I said. She laughed, but in a kind way.

'It took me some time to accept that I was part of that sort of Christian community. Naturally I wouldn't just accept things other people said. I had to develop my own relationship with God. The church people see me as somebody inquisitive. It's been a growing relationship. I now feel that the Lord uses all sorts of people. I can't expect everyone to think the way I do.

'I believe that in the Bible we have a lead for our lives. God is not to blame. Things like racism are signs of the fact that we are all sinners and fall short of God's teaching and His glory. I believe that anybody calling themselves truly Christian couldn't be consciously racist. But I also realise that racism is so much part of this society that people have racist attitudes almost inadvertently.

'It was important for me at one point that the church I worshipped

in was black, because no longer did I have to deal with being black, consciously or unconsciously. And you can't imagine how important the absence of that sort of pressure is.

'When we grow closer to God we realise that there are all sorts of imperfections in our personal life, in other people, in institutions. Therefore you are able to deal with, but not accept, things like racism. Now I could go into an all-white church to worship because I know that the focus is on God who is neither black nor white but perfect, and that he has not ordained racism as part of life.

'It's very important that young black people see other blacks in positions of leadership and authority. That's no less true of the church. If you've got a multi-racial congregation, it seems odd if all positions in the church are held by white people. Black people need to feel that it is just as much their church as anybody else's.

'But the racism outside the church is bound to affect our attitude and relationship with white people wherever we meet them.

'White people have to understand how a black person feels.'

### *The Third Story*

'I have felt a vocation ever since I was ten years old. I was brought up an Anglican in Nevis. When I arrived in this country, I kept in touch with the church loosely, but later on I got more and more involved.

'When I first talked to my parish priest about my vocation, he tried to prepare me for the blow. He tried to soften it by saying I wasn't well enough educated to be accepted for the ministry. Later on I was told that the church could not support my family financially if I went to be trained full-time. Yet I knew a white man with six children under 18 who went to be trained with the support of the church.

'The church is not colour-blind. It is biased against its black members and in favour of its white members. It wants to do things for black people, rather than see us do things for ourselves.

'But I am not going to give up. I am here to do a job, and I am going to do that job in whatever situation.

'I am more than ever determined not to join one of the black churches. I was brought up in the Anglican church, which I regard as the world-wide church. And I want my children to be part of that worldwide church. I work for change in the institution.

'I want to see black people become truly integrated. Not just

integrated at the bottom of the ladder, but integrated in places of recognition.

‘Both the authorities and the congregations are not doing enough towards this integration. If the local congregations are not welcoming, if they don’t accept people for what they are, namely a child of God who has ambitions, dignity, who wants to participate – unless it starts in the congregations, how can it be better at the top. To make black people churchwardens and Sunday School teachers can just be a gloss on the top that has no effect on what goes on at the bottom.

‘If the church is the church of the oppressed, then it has to do something positive. But it is so aligned with the state that its policies are almost the same.

‘Where decisions are made, black people have to be seen to be there. How else can white people know what is going on in the black community?

‘But it is going to take a lot of convincing for black people even to look at the Church of England again. Every black person in the church now is a black pearl, and should be encouraged.

‘The white person wants the black person to think and act like the white man. They say, “Forget your own culture, forget who you are, feel like us”.

‘Yet white people themselves are not prepared to come into our mind. They listen, but they aren’t ready to try and understand. It’s no good for white people just to talk to black people. They have to be prepared to say, “I believe you, what you say makes sense”.

‘It is imperative for the church to foster black vocations. If she does not, she is going to die a slow death as far as the black community is concerned.’

#### *The Fourth Story*

‘I came to this country from India to work and for further training. I soon became involved in my local church, because that was the way I had been brought up at home. Then I decided to become ordained. The vicar welcomed my decision, but he showed me hardly any pastoral care while I was training. I thought I was the adopted son, but in fact I was an orphan.

‘CACTM (The Central Advisory Council for Training for the Ministry, now ACCM) accepted me, but suggested I went to train in India. My bishop, however, said he would ordain me, and so I trained here.

‘Even though I was trained in England and was 29 years old when

I was ordained, it was twelve years before I had a parish of my own. Two parishes turned me down. I wrote letters to several bishops. None of them asked to see me. Their reply was, I would be considered when they next had a vacancy. But I never heard from any of them again.

'The church should give black people a chance. It should enable black people to take charge. They will make mistakes, of course, not because they are black, but because they are human beings, and they are learning. Tokenism is not a bad thing, as long as the black people appointed don't become puppets in other people's hands. When a black person is put into a position of responsibility, that inspires others. They will think, "If he can do it, so can I".

'White people find it difficult to accept black people in authority. they don't easily take advice from black people. When I came to this church, the churchwardens could not accept that I was in charge. They left a few months later.

'Every parish I worked in somebody walked out when I walked in. Not so much older people. They have respect for the cloth. More the younger ones. They don't expect leadership from Asians, and if they do meet it, they find it difficult to accept. The church tends to reflect society and not Christ.

'Most black priests are offered inner city parishes. When I first came to this parish, I did not know much about West Indians. They were foreign to me. The historical relationship between black people and Asians has not been an easy one, especially in Africa and the West Indies. Asians and Whites have both misused black people. There exists, therefore, a lot of mistrust between all three groups. I myself have only resolved this over the last five years.

'I feel that among colleagues you are considered spineless if you are quiet. And if you speak up, they say you've got a chip on your shoulder. I have been quiet for twenty years. I was on my own. Belonging to the Association of Black Clergy has changed that. Through its corporateness I have gained confidence, and I speak up now.

'The Church has been very insensitive in matters of race. Its caring for black people is abysmal. The existence of the black Pentecostal churches makes the Church stand condemned.

'As a black person you need to be pretty strong to survive in the Church of England. When you adopt a child you give him that bit of extra care. Black people need to be spoiled by the church.

'For myself, I want to be adopted and I am prepared to adapt. But

in no way am I going to be a coconut (brown outside, white inside). I want the Church to see me as an Indian. I want to be distinguishable. The Church needs something like a cataract operation. It needs to learn to see the special contribution black people can make, especially in their spirituality.'

#### VOICES OF WHITE PRIESTS

##### *The First Voice*

'Even though immigrants from the West Indies had lived in the area for many years, the church only had one black member ten years ago. The Boys' Brigade met at the church. They had a lot of black kids, but an all white staff. Because of the Boys' Brigade the church was respected in the black community.

'Change came through tragic events, the death of two young people. The first was a girl from a black family. We did the funeral well, and some black people started coming after that. At the second funeral both the white and the black community were present. That too brought black people into church. Through old-fashioned pastoral things a black Sunday presence developed. As the vicar, I worked at it quite consciously. The congregation let it happen, but would not themselves have initiated it.

'By special invitation a few black people started coming during the week. The person who was elected onto the PCC never spoke at PCC meetings.

'The Church was run by committees. When it was decided to form a new committee called the "neighbourhood committee", I asked an already active black woman to be the chairperson and to get some other friends to join her. The committee became predominantly black, and was something like a power-base for the black members of the congregation.

'Gradually black and white people were able to learn about each other, for instance in the bible-study group where we told our own stories and then related those to the Bible story. Here black and white people were together, listening to each others' experiences. We held social evenings at the church, when we tasted each other's food. We worked together on refurbishing the church.

'The chairperson of the "neighbourhood committee" became churchwarden, and she is still churchwarden now. The black presence in the congregation had a considerable influence on my theological development, as well as on the worship of the church. I

learnt a lot about preaching from the sermons of Martin Luther King.'

### *The Second Voice*

'When I came to this parish, 20 per cent of the worshipping congregation were black. But there was little mixing. A great number of weekday things happened without black members taking part. Black people in the church need double reassurance. An automatic growing together would never happen.

'I think we need to practise positive discrimination. Whenever we started something new in the church, like lay administration of the chalice I said, "We ought to have somebody black in this".

'Then I began to feel that we wouldn't get anywhere unless we had the black people together. So I personally invited twelve to fifteen black families to the vicarage for a Saturday evening. It was just them, my wife and myself. None of the families had known each other before they joined the church.

'I said to them, "I believe that you have got a place in this church. When Black and White work and worship together it is a witness to the world". One of the people present that evening has recently become our first black churchwarden.

'Out of the evening developed the "Caribbean Club" which existed for over two years.

'After a while white members of the congregation were invited to the social evenings. Here were black people inviting white people to their own thing. That was very important.

'Even though the club no longer meets, black people now participate in the social activities of the church such as trips, harvest supper and others.

'It's harder to make things happen when black people form a minority in the church. I believe totally in positive discrimination.

'What I am most interested in is to establish and maintain a working class base for the church. The Church of England has never won the working class for Christ. For me that is the primary front.

'The other of my aims and objectives for this church is that black people should find a spiritual home in it in the fullest sense.'

### *The Third Voice*

'From my own charismatic background I feel an affinity to the way black people worship and in my theological development I am finding a greater simplicity of faith centred on the "stories" of the

Bible. Here again I feel close to black people. White members of the congregation are often not sensitive to black people. They join the church because of the relaxed atmosphere in worship, because of the presence of black people. But once there, they do not sit back. Because they are good at running an organisation by committees, they are voted onto the PCC, and they hold a lot of the power. The people in charge of the community work of the church are nearly all white. There is a danger for the church in the inner ring to become a white middle-class mission to the black inner-city. This keeps black people in a receiving role.

‘I want to help the congregation from a paternalistic dependence on the priest and on white members to spiritual independence. I want to give dignity to West Indian spirituality, and I want that spirituality to spread to the white people in the congregation.

‘The West Indian spirituality is special because it was moulded by the experience of slavery and the subsequent black history.

‘Black people’s wealth of spirituality and depth of faith is a gift to the church to which the white dry life and faith should be exposed. The church can only gain from this encounter.

‘The Church of England is an establishment church. The question is whether it can adapt so that it is not just a middle-class church. For the people to have more power, the institution would have to be much weaker, *we* would have to be much weaker.’

#### *The Fourth Voice*

‘When I first came to the church to work here as a curate I was surprised at the size of the congregation and at its high proportion of black members. To have a black parish priest was also unusual.

‘When he came here the church underwent a great change from a fairly small white congregation to a large congregation, mainly black.

‘This new growth affected the dynamics in the church. Black people grew in confidence and participated more and more. Now both wardens are black. There is still a reserve, though.

‘The relationship between priest and congregation was not always smooth. There was conflict at times, especially with the older black congregation. But they still felt it was important to have a black priest.

‘This is even more true for the younger generation. Their parents are rooted in Anglicanism in which they were brought up in the West Indies. They want to be Anglicans and don’t feel at home in a



"clap-hand church". But the second generation questions the relevance of the Anglican church to their lives. The music of the black churches has a great pulling power for them, but they find the discipline too rigid and narrow-minded.

'In some ways the change in the church had to be forced on the white members. But only a few of them left. When I came, I think they saw me as a possible ally. Not for long though, because I started going out with someone black. When I married her, I married into the black community. The trust people put in me grew, because they could see my commitment.

'Majority black churches perform a vital role as places where black Anglicans can establish themselves as a major force in the church. Black people have to consolidate within their own community in order to be able to assert themselves. The fostering of black vocations is very important. The opportunities are here, but they need a lot of development.

'One role of the priest in the inner city is to voice criticism of the institution and to raise protest, like the Association of Black Clergy is doing. Unless there are some vital changes in the institution and some real commitment, the church in the inner city has a limited life.

'At theological college I did not receive the kind of training I felt I needed. A group of students tried to effect change, but that proved difficult. Change needs to be brought about by the staff who are there permanently.

'Post-ordination training is highly fragmented. It is difficult to come to grips with an issue. We had one session on race, during which we saw the film-strip "The Enemy Within". Most people present seemed to say they did not know what the fuss is all about. White people don't know what the experience of being black in the church is like.'

## **V Evaluation**

Runciman in his description of evaluation as part of sociological research, gives a humorous example of it from the book *1066 and All That*. In it every historical person or event is classified as a Good Thing or a Bad Thing.

Jokes apart, I imagine it will not surprise the reader to learn that I regard the situation I have just described as a Bad Thing.

Other people might come to different conclusions. I have for the last ten years been a member of a multi-racial congregation. That

experience and my own understanding of the Church as a place of reconciliation and unity leads me to say that a segregated church is a contradiction in terms.

It is my belief that only if black Anglicans are fully incorporated into their Church, will that Church be true to the Gospel on which it is founded.

On the basis of this conviction I have drawn the following conclusions.

### **Recommendations to the Church for Action**

#### **PRESUPPOSITION**

The following recommendations are not meant to add a list of items to the agenda of the Church, like adding 'Black Studies' to an already existing curriculum in schools. What I am proposing is a reorientation of thought and action, a widening of the Church's perspective that incorporates both Black and White Christianity.

#### **NECESSARY CHANGES AT DIOCESAN LEVEL**

At diocesan level the priorities for the whole diocese are decided, and the atmosphere of the diocese is fashioned. At this level change can be initiated and sustained.

#### **THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE CHURCH**

Because of the multi-racial nature of Birmingham and the Black Country and the widespread presence of black Anglicans in the diocese, the Church must incorporate Black Christianity into its very being. That will enable black Anglicans to be part of their Church without having to deny their history and their present identity.

Black Anglicans should be visible wherever the Church is seen. On civic occasions in the Cathedral, for instance. At the enthronement of a bishop, or at similar services. The media image of the Church should be black *and* white. Black Anglicans should be part of the network that links us with the Church in twin-towns of Europe. Diocesan publications like 'Lookout' should reflect life in the whole of the diocese.

#### **BISHOPS' AND ARCHDEACONS' VISITATIONS**

As part of their function of giving pastoral supervision and direction to the diocese, both Bishops regularly undertake visitations in parishes. They spend two days in the parish and get to know both the congregation and its relationship with the parish at large. Such

visitations are opportunities on which a church's relationship with the black community should be examined, as well as relationships between black and white within the congregation, where that is appropriate.

Archdeacons hold an annual visitation in their Archdeaconry at which they meet newly-elected churchwardens. For this occasion all churchwardens are required to fill in the Articles of Enquiry. These should contain 'ethnic' questions similar to those I used in my survey. That way black church members would regularly be brought to the attention of the leadership of the church, and the development monitored by an appropriate diocesan officer.

#### APPOINTMENTS

Any priest newly appointed to the Diocese should have an ability to appreciate and a willingness to understand the multi-racial nature of the Church and its environment.

For interviews concerning the appointment to a multi-racial parish the Bishop should enlist the help of an adviser to judge the ability of a candidate to get alongside the black members of the congregation, as David Sheppard put it in his recent Dimpleby Lecture 'to stand in the shoes of black people'.

#### RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

The Church in this diocese has a wealth of resources for learning readily available.

Its primary resource are its own black members, lay and ordained. They embody in themselves the history, the suffering and the spirituality of black people and can be used as resource persons by those parishes who have no black members themselves.

A secondary resource are the black-led churches in the city. They are a model and an encouragement to Anglican blacks and a strong and confident expression of Black Christianity to white Christians. Their training centre, the Central Bible Institute, is located in Birmingham, so is the Centre for Partnership Between Black and White.

A number of Gospel Choirs have been formed in Birmingham's black churches, of which some have gained a national reputation. They are living resources of black Christian music.

In addition, the Selly Oak Colleges have regular visitors from overseas. They are witnesses of Black Christianity in other parts of the Anglican Communion.

#### IN-SERVICE TRAINING

The Bishop's Summer School and Extra-mural courses at the University of Birmingham should be used to introduce clergy and laity to a theology that encompasses the faith and experience of both White and Black Christianity.

#### DEALING WITH CONFLICTS ABOUT RACE

Small, in his article on transracial adoptions referred to above, says, 'The majority of transracial adopters find it difficult to refer to the child as black and moreover they feel that telling the child about its ethnic origin is potentially dangerous' (Small: 140).

The Church needs to encourage its members openly to talk about questions of colour and race. White Christians need to know that it is all right to see somebody black *as* black, because only then can White and Black come to a proper understanding of each other.

Small says that an adoptive family should be able to deal with conflicts about colour within and outside the family.

So far the Church has addressed itself chiefly to race conflicts in society but has failed to see that precisely the same conflicts are present in its own life, and has therefore not dealt with them openly.

#### A CODE OF PRACTICE

Legislation and guidelines such as 'codes of practice' cannot change the hearts of people. They do, however, provide a yardstick for what is acceptable practice and what is not. The Church should follow the lead of other institutions (Trade Unions, Local Authorities) and formulate guidelines appropriate to its own structures and in accordance with its Scriptural foundations.

#### POSITIVE ACTION

My research has shown that equality of opportunity for black people does not result in equality of outcome. If equality of outcome is the desired goal, then positive action has to be undertaken. Such policy has many opponents who see in it discrimination in reverse, and is therefore not part of the Race Relations Legislation in this country. The Church should set an example and take steps to recruit black people to work in the diocese. Such recruitment should be, for instance, of black clergy and of administrative staff at Church House. Using the usual channels of advertising will always supply enough white people for the posts available. Only positive action in recruitment will create a multiracial staff.

## NECESSARY CHANGES AT PARISH LEVEL

### *Participation*

Among the mixed congregations in the diocese six different types can be found.

1. Black people are the majority of the congregation and hold important leadership positions.
2. Black people are in the majority, but leadership is in the hands of white people.
3. Black people are a sizeable minority and participate in the leadership of the church.
4. Black people are a sizeable minority, but do not share in the leadership of the church.
5. Black people are a small minority, but share in the leadership.
6. Black people are a small minority and hold no positions of responsibility.

Churches of type 2 and 4 need to work towards a greater participation of black people in the decision-making processes. As a first step black attenders should get together as a group and develop a sense of solidarity. They should be registered on the Electoral Roll and specially invited to the Annual General Meeting. Encouraging them to stand for election onto PCC and as churchwardens, or co-opting them onto PCCs are necessary first steps. Once they are on the PCC, the chairman needs to ensure that their voice is heard.

A firm base in their parishes will give black leaders the confidence to participate in wider church government, where so far they are not represented at all.

### *Sunday Schools/Junior Church*

Efforts have to be made to reduce the discrepancy between the number of churches with black children in their Sunday Schools and the number of churches with black Sunday School teachers. More black teachers have to be recruited and trained. All Sunday Schools in the diocese should have teaching material that reflects and is relevant to a multi-racial Church. The production and/or provision of such materials is the responsibility of the diocesan officer concerned.

### *Opportunities for Work with Young People*

My survey showed that a great number of churches are in contact with young black people through their community organisations.

The opportunities provided are not fully realized by the Church.

One of the parish priests I interviewed told me that in his experience ministering to the black members of his congregation involved two kinds of ministry, one to the first generation, the other to the second. 'At the moment we are still learning how to minister to the first generation'. In contrast, a pastor from a black-led church said that the first generation had now to look after itself, and that his work was predominantly with the second and third generation. Unless the mainstream churches tackle that task, they will fail the younger black generation and lose its future as far as the black community in this country is concerned.

#### *Development of a Positive Identity of Black Christians*

'Helping the child to develop a positive racial identity is an essential component of good parenting in a transracial setting . . . it is important for the child to see (other) black people a) to reduce the feeling of isolation, b) to mirror the blackness of the child, c) to provide black role models' (Small: 141).

Of the five churches with sizeable black congregations where I participated in Sunday worship, one had black religious art displayed, two had made room in the liturgy for free prayer, three had adult black members in the sanctuary, to read a lesson or to administer the chalice.

Both white and black church members need to experience the ministry of black people. The former to appreciate the contribution of Black Christianity to the Church, the latter to develop a positive identity as black Christians.

As the report above has shown, black Anglicans in this diocese are dispersed, often in small numbers, among a great number of churches. Regular meetings of, for instance, black churchwardens and black Sunday School teachers or special diocesan conventions of black Anglicans would be means to overcome the feeling of isolation, and would foster a sense of solidarity, strength and confidence. The member of the Association of Black Clergy whom I interviewed stressed the importance of this experience of corporateness for the individual members.

The urgent need to foster black vocations in the Anglican Church was mentioned by all black interviewees. For a multi-racial Church to be whole, it needs black as well as white spiritual leadership. So far the Church has done nothing to encourage black people to train for the ministry. Unless that situation changes the hope of winning the

second and third generation for the church is small. The 'Young, Gifted and Black' conferences organised by the Association of Black Clergy are a step in the right direction. Much thinking still needs to be done as to the content and form of training and the models of ministry appropriate in this situation.

This leads to my last point.

*The Training for Ministry in Theological Colleges*

The responsibility for such training lies with the whole church, not with individual dioceses. But Birmingham has such a college, namely The Queen's College, within its diocese. Since a good number of its clergy are trained there, the Diocese should concern itself with the training students receive.

Theological training in Birmingham should involve students closely with the life of the city, and the reflections upon such involvement should have Black Christianity and its contribution to the life of mainstream churches at its centre.

In an interview I conducted with five students from Queen's College, the following observations were made.

1. It is left to the initiative of the students where and to what extent they get involved with the life of the Church in Birmingham. For those students who don't know the city it is difficult to find out what possibilities for involvement there are. The location of the college was felt to be a factor that distances students from the life of the city.
2. Black Christianity is not part of the curriculum of the college. 'Liberation Theology' does get a mention, but only in the context of the Third World. Its relevance to the Church in Britain is not discussed.
3. Black Christians are experienced as part of the multi-faith situation of the Church in Birmingham, as members of Pentecostal churches rather than as integral members of the students' own mainstream church.
4. The students felt that rather than learning from books and from academic staff and taking the knowledge gained with them into the parishes, learning should start at their place of involvement, and the experience gained there brought to the academic studies and reflections.

These voices were echoed by two parish priests in their inter-

views. One felt that theological training in its present form removed future clergy from working-class life in such a way that many could not enter into it when they came to work in a parish. The other stressed that basic training for the ministry comes from involvement, and that inner city parishes are especially good areas for training, because they expose the students to a world different from their own middle-class environment.

The institutional structures of theological training are well established, and it will not be easy to bring about change. But a multi-racial Church needs clergy who are trained within the life and vision of that Church.

Time is running short. The danger of apartheid between the churches of this country is very real.

My research has shown that in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Birmingham there still is a great number of black Christians to whom that Church is home. It would be to the Church of England's own detriment, and to the detriment of the wider Christian witness in this country, if the Anglican Church fails to respond to the challenge to change which the black presence requires.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed to collect basic information about black Anglicans and their relationship with the church. It was designed as a postal questionnaire to be filled in by the parish priest. When it was sent out it was accompanied by a letter of recommendation from the Bishop of Birmingham, Hugh Montefiore, plus an explanatory letter from myself. In that I stated the purpose for the questionnaire, defined the meaning of the terms used, and encouraged respondents to add any information important to them on the subject.

In order to achieve a good response rate the questionnaire is brief and the questions require factual answers. But they do cover a wide area of parish life, and should give a full picture of the participation of black members.

Two mistakes were made, one in the design, the other in the distribution of the questionnaire. Question 7 asks for a breakdown in percentages of the age of the congregation. Unfortunately it was not made clear whether age group or the racial group should add up to 100 per cent. Respondents answered the question in different ways, and the figures given are therefore not comparable.



The questionnaires were sent out without identification as to who they had been sent to. Respondents were asked to fill in the name of the church, but some did not do so, and out of the 135 questionnaires returned eight have remained unidentified. One respondent asked to remain anonymous.

Because of the limited time available for the project the questionnaires had to go out three weeks before Christmas, at a time when the workload is especially heavy for any parish priest. Nevertheless there was an immediate response of over 50 per cent. A reminder was sent out in January, which together with some phone calls brought the response rate up to 75 per cent.

There is a feeling among some clergy that it is wrong to ask for statistics based on differentiating church members into 'black' and 'white'. One questionnaire carried the following p.s. 'I have hesitated about filling in this questionnaire because I find the whole idea of singling out black people rather distasteful.' How many colleagues share those views, and for how many that may have been the reason for not responding, I am unable to say.

# **The Black Anglican Presence in the Diocese of Birmingham**

Name and location of Church

1. How many people were on the Electoral Roll of the parish at AGM 1983?

White

☐

Black

☐

2. What is the usual Sunday Attendance at your church (aged 17 and over)?

White

☐

Black

☐

3. Do some of the people attending your Church have their origin in the following areas?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Africa

☐
☐

Caribbean

☐
☐

India/Bangladesh/Pakistan

☐
☐

4. Which Islands of the Caribbean are represented among those attending your church who originated from that area?

Many

☐

Few

☐

None

☐

Jamaica

Barbados

Leeward Islands

(St Kitts, Nevis

Montserrat, Antigua)

Others

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

5. What is the composition of the general population of your parish?

White

Asian

Afro-Caribbean

Majority

Sizeable  
Minority

Virtually  
None

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

6. How many regular attenders of your church live outside the parish boundaries and are beyond reasonable walking distance from the church?

White

Black

☐
☐

7. What is the age range of the congregation (approximate percentage)?

Under 18

18 – 29

30 – 45

46 – 60

Over 60

White

Black

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

8. How many children and young people attend Sunday School/Junior Church regularly (at least once a month)?

White

Black

☐
☐

9. How many Baptisms have taken place at your church in the last twelve months?

White

Black

☐
☐

10. How many weddings have taken place at your church in the last twelve months?

White

Black

☐
☐

11. Which organisations are part of the life of your church and how many black people belong to these organisations?

a) Organisations mainly for church members, i.e. choir, Prayer/Bible Study Group, M.U., Men's Group

Name of organisation	Black Membership		
	Many	Few	None

b) Organisations run by the church but open to the whole community,  
i.e. playgroup, youth club, luncheon club, holiday playscheme . . . (not including groups which merely rent church premises)

Name of organisation	Black Membership		
	Many	Few	None

12. What members of staff does your church have?

a) Stipendiary Ministry

Incumbent or Priest-in-Charge

White

Black

☐
☐

Team Vicars

☐
☐

Assistant Curate/Deaconess

☐
☐

Parish Worker

☐
☐

b) Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Non-Stipendiary Minister

☐
☐

Reader

☐
☐

Others (e.g. Elders, Lay Pastor, please state which)

☐
☐
☐
☐

c) Church Wardens

Treasurer

White

Black

☐
☐

P.C.C. Secretary

☐
☐

P.C.C. Vice-Chairman

☐
☐
☐
☐

13. How many members of your church are training for the Ordained Ministry (incl. Deaconesses)?

a) Stipendiary

White

Black

☐
☐

b) Non-Stipendiary

☐
☐

14. How many members are attending the Reader's training course?

White

Black

☐
☐

15. What paid employees are there in your church?

White

Black

Verger/Sacristan

☐☐

Organist

☐☐

Youth Leader

☐☐

Cleaner

☐☐

Secretary

☐☐

Others (please state which)

☐☐

16. How many people teach in the Sunday School?

White

Black

☐☐

17. How many people perform sidesmen/women duties?

White

Black

☐☐

18. How many servers do you have?

☐☐

19. How many members has the Parochial Church Council?

☐☐

20. How many members of your church are representatives on

a) Diocesan Synod

☐☐

b) Deanery Synod

☐☐

21. Please describe any other contributions black members make to the life of your church:

22. Are there any particular issues that have arisen through the presence of black people in your congregation?

23. Have there been any significant changes in

a) the size

b) the social and ethnic make-up of the congregation during the last ten years?

Please describe:

### **Recommended Reading**

Runcie, Robert, 'The Choice for Britain and the churches', *New Equals* 19, Commission for Racial Equality, 1982

Sheppard, David, *The Black Experience in Britain*. Christian Action, 1981

Small, J. W., 'The Crisis in Adoption' in Burke, *Transcultural Psychiatry, Racism and Mental Illness*. *The International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, Vol. 30, 1 and 2, 1984

The Community and Race Relations Unit of the British Council of Churches, *The New Black Presence: A Christian Scrutiny*, 1976

Wilmore, G. S., *Black and Presbyterian. The Heritage and the Hope*. The Geneva Press, 1983.

# THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY: BLACK PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

JAMES H. EVANS JR

## Introduction

One of the unfinished tasks of black theology is a definition of the black church. Coming as I do from a black Baptist tradition which has the tendency to think of its affirmation of the faith as absolute, my early attempts to address a black ecclesiology virtually ignored black people in the Anglican communion. Two things happened which changed my thinking on the subject. First, I met and became friends with the late Canon Julian A. Simpkins, Jr, the rector of St Simon's parish in Rochester, New York. Canon Simpkins, besides being a warm and genuinely Christian person, was both black and Anglican in every conceivable positive sense of those words. The opportunity to know him and worship at St Simon's greatly expanded the meaning of 'black church' for me. So deep was his contribution to my thinking, that this essay is written in his memory. Second, four years ago I began teaching in the Programme of Black Church Studies at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary. The presence of Episcopal colleagues, both black and white, and Episcopal students, both black and white, challenged me to examine the relation between the black church and the Anglican communion.

The opportunity to research this essay 'on location' so to speak, was made possible by a grant from the Conant Funds of the Episcopal Church in the USA, which allowed me to spend part of the summer of 1984 in England, and for which I am very grateful. Finally, I would like to thank Kenneth Leech, Barry Thorley, Keith Jenkins, David Moore, and the Institute of Race Relations, all of London, who provided priceless assistance in this research. Although the enormity of this subject warrants a more exhaustive treatment, the scope of this essay is modest. The struggle for identity of black people in the Church of England is examined by looking briefly at



the historical dimensions of racism in England; the ecclesiastical dimensions of racism in the church; the cultural dimensions of being both black and Anglican; and finally, the theological prospects for the future.

### **1. Racism in England**

England, like virtually every other Western nation, has a history of racial oppression. People of colour have been the victims of imperialistic conquest and colonial exploitation. National aspirations have been fuelled by the blood and labour of non-white peoples. Although the situation in Britain with regard to people of colour has changed substantially since the break-up of the empire in the 1960s, this history is an important component in any analysis of racism in England today. In addition, the peculiar configuration of British life means that this analysis cannot actually separate the actions of the state and those of the Church, in relation to black people.

In 1924 J. H. Oldham's *Christianity and the Race Problem* was published in England by the Student Christian Movement. The author's intention was to ascertain whether or not the Christian Church had anything worthwhile to say about racism.<sup>1</sup>

Oldham's book focused on the colonial occupation of East Africa which began in 1895. As a Christian attempting to come to terms with his nation's imperialistic exploitation of that region which is now known as Kenya, he employed an analysis of colonialism and racism provided by Dr Norman Leys. Leys was a physician and a Christian who attempted to live out his conviction that black people and white people were equally the children of God. His criticism of British colonialism led to his dismissal from his position in the Colonial Office. In 1918 Leys and Oldham began a correspondence which eventually led to the publication of Oldham's book.

There were several crucial aspects of Leys' analysis which highlighted the issue of racial exploitation as a social problem. The first is that racist attitudes permeated the colonial relationship between the British and the people of East Africa. The irrationality which so often marks the racist mentality is apparent in the attempts of whites to classify the native peoples as 'protected persons' but without all the rights of subjects'.<sup>2</sup>

The second is that the racist attitudes of the colonialists were intricately related to the economic goals of the empire.

Here was a classic racial situation, of black and white in economic and political confrontation. Should the whites be supported in their use of political power, backed by the military, to achieve and enhance their economic power at the expense of the black? Should force be used to compel blacks to become workers for whites?<sup>3</sup>

The issue of forced labour was exacerbated by the British policy of giving away huge parcels of African territory to white settlers, mostly former World War 1 soldiers. This brought an immense demand for free or cheap labour. The government intervened to make it almost impossible for any native Kenyan to live without working for whites.<sup>4</sup> Third, the native Africans and white invaders lived according to two different value systems. The values which each group placed on labour and material possession were so different that the value and cultural systems of the former had to be effectively destroyed for the benefit of the latter. This was reflected in the following declaration by the Duke of Devonshire:

Primarily, Kenya is an African territory, and His Majesty's Government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that if, and when, those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail.<sup>5</sup>

The issues of racism, economic exploitation, forced labour, and cultural annihilation were threads within the social fabric which made up British life in the first half of the twentieth century.

To his credit, Oldham raised the question of racism and its challenge to the Christian faith. He attempted to bring it to the top of the Church's agenda for the twentieth century. William Temple, who was then Bishop of Manchester, asserted in a review of the book that 'race (is) the greatest of all practical problems facing mankind . . . (it is) the acid test of a religion that claims to have a Gospel for all mankind.'<sup>6</sup> Oldham's *Christianity and the Race Problem*, like Temple's *Christianity and the Social Order*, proposed classic liberal solutions to the 'problem' of race. chief among them was education. The belief was that racial antagonism was not the result of some natural defect in human nature, but of patterns of thought and conduct. Thus, a change in one's convictions, would lead to change

in thought and deed. That is, 'the source of the difficulty lies in the realm of ideas, not of natural facts or laws'.<sup>7</sup> The decades ahead would expose the frailty of this solution, yet in historical context, the achievement of Leys, Oldham, and Temple should not be minimized. As R. Elliott Kendall observes, there are two good reasons for recalling this history.<sup>8</sup>

First, the three people mentioned above saw that racism was more than a personal problem. it was ingrained in the economic and political institutions of British society. Second, the profound moral challenge of race to the Christian faith in Britain did not arise from South Africa, or the southern United States, but from British colonies. Perhaps, more condemning than both of these points is that that challenge was spearheaded by two laymen, highlighting the support of the church for the racist status quo.

History is ignored at the risk of one's own peril. The contemporary state of black people in England indicates that fundamentally little has changed in the attitudes and policies of white people in the years since 1920. In 1958 violence erupted in Notting Hill. In 1979 and 1980 similar occurrences were observed in Southall and St Paul's Bristol respectively. In April 1981 violence erupted in Brixton. The common thread which linked all of these events together was that they were responses to the violence of racial oppression. These so-called riots were in some ways the inevitable result of the society's refusal to recognize and honour the dignity and worth of its black citizens. The Brixton disturbance grew out of the determination of the black community to no longer silently endure physical attacks from white racist groups and organizations. In March 1981 thousands of black people peacefully marched through Central London to protest these attacks. Unfortunately, their eloquent message was ignored, and through a maze of actions and circumstances, many of which are yet unclear, the institutional violence of British society spilled out into the streets of Brixton on April 10th-13th, 1981.

These outbreaks can be seen as the response to a growing tide of white supremacist attitudes in England. The demise of the British Empire, an almost overwhelming influx of Afro-Caribbean and Asian people in the post-war years, and a bruised, insecure white national ego, led to the growth of fascist and neo-Nazi organizations. White youth groups such as 'skin-heads' are very visible in British society. Recent estimates of the ethnic non-white population of Britain reveal that out of a total population of 56,000,000, 719,000

are from India, 519,000 are from the West Indies and Guyana, 283,000 are from Pakistan, 65,000 are from Africa, and 52,000 are from Bangladesh.<sup>9</sup> The loss of national prestige, the presence of so many non-white peoples, and a tight housing and job market are ripe conditions for the emergence of overt racism.

These facts determine what it means to be black in Britain. In Britain 'black' means anyone of colour. Blackness is as much of a political as a cultural designation. The complaint from many people of colour in Britain is that citizenship in the United Kingdom means the wholesale adoption of British culture and the resignation of one's indigenous culture. The thing which people of colour in England have in common is a history of colonial oppression by England. The neo-colonial mentality is still prevalent and is fed by the same benevolent/malevolent paternalism which supports the National Welfare State. The crown is the repository of this mentality and it is undergirded by the residue of British inspired theories of racial superiority and scientific racism.

In Britain 'black' refers to Afro-Caribbeans and Asians (from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India primarily) and the small number of Africans in the country).<sup>10</sup> After World War 2 England, in need of labour to rebuild, invited everyone in. Everyone who entered was granted citizenship. Afro-Caribbeans went primarily into the service industries, the Asians primarily into the factories. Both groups consider themselves black because of their common history of colonial oppression and their contemporary experience of racism. Blacks occupied many menial jobs. Though work could be found, housing and decent schools were scarce. These problems, left unattended, contributed to the eruptions in Brixton and Toxteth. A striking feature of the British black population is the absence of a substantial middle class. Because Britain, after the war, was not and perhaps would never again be a wealthy nation, it could not create a black middle class. What emerged was a small petite bourgeoisie among blacks, confined to lower level administration positions within government and the clerical sector of the corporate sphere. An example of this is found in the community of Liverpool. In his Gore Memorial Lecture delivered in 1981, David Sheppard, the Bishop of Liverpool, observes that 'there has been a Black community in Liverpool for over a hundred years. But Liverpool-born Black managers, foremen, lawyers, teachers and clergy are hardly to be seen.'<sup>11</sup> One result of the absence of a black middle class is that very few blacks are in a position either to provide intellectual

leadership to the black community, or translate to wealthy white leaders the problems of the urban black poor.

All of this means that in relation to the fundamental necessities for an abundant life, black people in Britain are confronted with iron apathy and outright discrimination. The results of a government sponsored survey from the Policy Studies Institute observed that the housing and job markets are still worst for black Britons.<sup>12</sup> Black people earn less than whites, are unemployed more often than whites, and live in housing which is inferior to that of whites. The report concludes that 'the position of black Britons remains geographically and economically the same as when they first arrived, in the 1950s and 1960s'. Perhaps the most pernicious evidence of the plight of black people in Britain is the implementation of the Nationality Act. Both the foes and supporters of this legislation are vocal and committed. To its foes it is an attempt to disenfranchise black people from the fruits of a society built upon their labour and that of their ancestors. To its supporters it is the attempt to preserve the traditional English way of life and perhaps even to return to racial purity. The modern Nationality Act is a complicated piece of legislation and it is not easily summarized.<sup>13</sup> Prior to 1948 the entire population of Britain and of the Empire were British subjects. In 1900 there were approximately 3772 million black British subjects and 50 million white. The 1948 British Nationality Act made it easy for all people who were subjects to become citizens. After spending a year in Britain they merely had to register themselves as citizens of the United Kingdom. This gradually changed over the years with the residence requirement growing to five years and finally a substantial payment was required for registration. There are two elements to this legislation which affect black people directly. First, most West Indians came to Britain as citizens in the 1940s and 1950s. When their countries became independent they automatically lost their British citizenship, even if they had lived in England most of their lives. This did not happen to white subjects in Australia. Second, exorbitant registration and naturalization fees effectively made it impossible for many black people to exercise the option to become citizens again. The effect of the latter stages of the Nationality Act is to eliminate all adult registration by 1987, and to force many black people out of England.

Black Britons are facing numerous threats to their dignity and to the place in society which they have earned by virtue of their contribution to that society. Forced emigration schemes continue to

surface and are receiving an ever-increasing hearing from white people who are concerned about the security of their way of life. What is being forfeited is the opportunity to forge a truly liberated society where it is genuinely possible for people from different cultural backgrounds to relate at a fundamental level. One Asian woman sums up the situation in a poignant way.

'In England people are very different from us. For example you are a Hindu and I am a Muslim, but when I meet you and talk to you I feel close to you very quickly. Here there is rarely any love between women. They are cold and hard. In my country it is easy to be friends with women. Here I have no friends.'<sup>14</sup>

## **II. Racism in the Church of England**

The history of England and the history of its Church are intertwined. The development of English society and the evolution of the Church of England occurred along parallel lines. The history of the relation between the Anglican Church and the Crown, or Church and State, can be understood as the latter finds its theological justification in the former.<sup>15</sup> The modified hierarchical form of church government was an apt vehicle for the paternalistic, colonial aspirations of the Empire. In the political life of the Church as well as the society as a whole, there is an outward liberalism. It is an open invitation to all people into British culture and faith. Society, via the National Welfare State and the Church appear ready to address the problems of the disinherited. (The Archbishop has recently appointed a Commission on Urban Priority Areas to examine the Church's responsibility in relation to the problems of the cities). However, it is interesting to note that for the society as a whole these problems are perceived as soluble through political adjustments. The assumption is that there is nothing inherently wrong with the status quo. For the Church these problems are perceived as ethical or moral. The assumption is that there is nothing inherently wrong with the liturgical-theological life of the Church. The absence of theological writings on this problem is evidence of this. Anglican theology is not generally constructive or systematic in character, but tends to be a learned response to liturgical and ecclesiastical issues. A review of Anglican theology suggest that the presence of black people in the Church of England has not had any real impact on the Church's liturgical practice or ecclesiastical identity.

The absence of a visible cultural contribution by black people to the life and liturgy of the Church of England can be partially explained by the formalized services mandated by the Book of Common Prayer. Thus there is little room for liturgical freelancing. However, it must be recognized that the BCP is a product/source of British culture and that black people who adhere to it are affected by that culture. The invisibility of black people in the Church of England is demonstrated by the paucity of attention paid to them in Paul A. Welsby's *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980*.<sup>16</sup> The irony is that 1945 was the beginning of the mass immigration of Afro-Caribbean people – many of them Anglicans – into Britain, and the commencement of a multiracial society and Church. It would seem that this phenomenon would be at least as important in focusing on 1945 – as the author does – as the year that England began a post-war reconstruction of society, and the Church, in celebrating the appointment of Geoffrey Fisher as the ninety-ninth Archbishop of Canterbury, looked toward revitalization.

There are very few, if any, written resources on black people and the Anglican Church.<sup>17</sup> This lacuna indicates that in relation to the Church, the important factor is 'Anglicanism' and not one's mores, values, symbol systems, and identity as a Christian and not whether one is African or Asian. However, it is difficult really to assess the role and contribution of black people in the Church of England because of the absence of empirical data. No one has kept accurate statistics of the number of black Anglicans in England. The view of the Church's leadership toward this issue is summarized in a letter to me from the Rt Rev. Graham Leonard, Bishop of London dated 5th December 1983.

. . . I think I should point out that there are no black Anglican churches as such in the Diocese. There are, of course, many churches with a preponderance of black congregations. The concept of black churches would be very difficult to fit in with the role of the Anglican parish church.

I am not suggesting that Bishop Leonard is any less sensitive to the issue of black people in the Church of England than are his colleagues. However, the point of his comment is clear. Black Anglicans, in this ecclesiology, do not constitute a viable worshipping community on the basis of a common history of oppression and affirmation of faith, but are in the Church only to the degree that they conform to the dominant image of Anglicanism. In sum, as

Kenneth Leech states, 'The sense of "we don't have a race relations problem here" (i.e. "We don't have any blacks") is deeply embedded in many dioceses.'<sup>18</sup> The Church recently received a report which suggested the direction and attempted to chart the course of the Anglican body well into the next century. John Tiller's *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (CIO 1983) is to be admired for the candour with which it faces up to the changes which have occurred in the Church and society in the last century.<sup>19</sup> Among these changes are the adjustments which are necessary in response to the significant economic and social consequences of the end of the British Empire. Life in post-imperial England offers a profound challenge to the Church and its ministry. The report also acknowledges the extent to which the Church is viewed as the guardian of civil religion which polarizes 'the true Britisher' and the unwanted 'alien'. The Church must free itself from its Anglocentrism. However, the major – and perhaps fatal – flaw in the report is that it virtually ignores the one group whose very presence constitutes the most eloquent challenge to British life and Anglican faith. The existence of black Anglicans is hardly mentioned in the report. The only direct mention of black people contained in the report are as 'losers in the urban race' and as members of the so-called 'black-led, independent and pentecostal churches which exist in urban priority areas'. The limitations of this report reflect the myopia which afflicts the prophetic vision of the Church of England. It says that black people in the Anglican Church are invisible.

As a result of their *invisibility*, black people in the Church of England experience a sense of powerlessness. Because they are not included in the grand ecclesiastical image of the Church they cannot effectively communicate within the structures, especially at the level of symbolic signification. To be able to participate in the symbolic discourse (theology) of the Church is crucial to the empowerment of black Anglicans. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie provides a revealing glimpse of the importance of this kind of discourse.

We do derive much of our understanding of the world and our sense of right and wrong relations to it through symbol. People who live in a monarchy where the Royal Family plays such an important part exemplifying social and family values and in giving people a sense of belonging, ought not to be blind to the extreme importance of the level of symbolic communication.<sup>20</sup>

The structures of the Church of England constitute a kind of



symbolic communication in relation to black people. Kenneth Leech, the Race Relations Field Officer of the Board for Social Responsibility of the General Synod of the Church of England, describes the place of his office and, symbolically, the concerns of black people within the Church structure.

My small office in Church House is very symbolically situated between two larger ones – the development officer, and the statistical unit. Between us there is no working relationship: we smile at one another in the corridors, and each go our separate ways. And this is a microcosm of the whole building. 'Race Relations' has been marginalised; it is one department among others. Instead of being a unit which asks fundamental and troublesome questions about the way in which the entire bureaucracy operates within a racist institution, we have quickly become another bureaucracy running on parallel lines with the rest.<sup>21</sup>

The symbolic structures of the Church and the real life problems of black people within it are intricately inter-connected. In many working class areas, the Church of England depends upon black parishioners for survival. Although black people are a minority within the Church as a whole, in terms of percentage, they attend Church in far greater numbers than whites. They are a religious people.<sup>22</sup> And yet the leadership of the Church has not recognized their need for indigenous leadership. There is one black parish in a British city which is led by a white South African priest. The symbolic message which such an appointment gives is that black people and their historic quest for freedom and justice do not matter to the Church of England.

What happens when black people cannot or are unwilling to relinquish the indigenous cultural identities? In England they join Pentecostal or 'black-led' churches. In Britain as elsewhere, Pentecostalism has been a refuge and repository for subordinate cultural systems. This is especially true for African cultural systems. The joining of a Pentecostal church is not just dropping out of Anglican culture, but it is the search for a place conducive to the nurturing of a cultural system which will not be dominated or repressed. The insensitivity and racism of the Anglican Church has been, to a large degree, responsible for the tremendous growth of the independent churches. Many black Pentecostals are disenfranchised Anglicans.

There are three aspects of black Pentecostal churches in Britain which are incompatible with the Anglican Church.<sup>23</sup> (1) *Female pastors*. There are prominent women pastors within Pentecostalism, including Rev. Io Smith a pastor in the New Testament Assembly,

and a former Anglican, while the Church of England does not recognize the legitimacy of the ordination of women. (2) *Emphasis on the New Testament*. Ideally, the Anglican Church is recognized as the 'via media' between the autocratic rule of the papacy (the Petrine ministry) and the democratic rule of the individual Spirit-filled conscience (the Pauline ministry). Both elements are present within the Church as the 'catholic' wing and the 'evangelical' wing, and both are within the boundaries of Anglican orthodoxy. However, the Church has, historically and in the present, often leaned toward the former at the expense of the latter. This has been the basis of many ecumenical discussions with the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches. This leading has resulted in a renewed emphasis on the Law as evidenced in a recent revision of Canon Law. The Law and the Old Testament has played an important role in the Church's self-definition.<sup>24</sup> The black Pentecostal churches emphasize the New Testament origins of the church; not the Petrine confession at Caesarea Philippi, but Acts 2, the coming of the Spirit. Thus the Church is a new creation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The freedom, both liturgical and political, which the exercise of the Spirit requires cannot be met under the conditions of the Law. (3) *Pentecostal churches cannot be national churches but must be cultural churches*.<sup>25</sup> The Church of England is supremely a national church.<sup>26</sup> Because Pentecostal churches are cultural churches they do not adhere to national boundaries or, in the ideal case, to racial boundaries. But because the societies in which they exist are racist, the racial boundaries usually become the outer limits of the movement of the common Spirit. For example, a few years ago the Seventh Day Adventist Church in England was white, middle-class and dying. Now it is primarily black, working class and vibrant. However, many black Pentecostals, including the Church of God, are surprised to discover that the leadership of their USA based denominational structures is predominantly white. Thus, at the denominational level black Pentecostals may face obstacles in exercising influence, but on the local level, they are free to organize themselves around the government of the Spirit, galvanized by a common racial and cultural history. The Church of England has not yet proved willing or able to include the search for a distinct cultural identity among non-western peoples in its ecclesiastical vision.

There are two major reasons why the Pentecostal churches have emerged as an alternative to the Church of England. Ben Cunningham, a member of the New Testament Church of God states:

One main reason why black churches emerged as we know them today is that, when the early immigrants came, they came right up against the twin problems of rejection and isolation, which was the direct result of the race problem of the host community. Baptists, Pentecostal and various other groups then attended the Baptist and Pentecostal Churches in this country. Some were politely told not to come back, or go and form their own organisation, and some were shunned or not given any opportunity to express themselves within the organisation. They were made conscious of their blackness and powerlessness, and as a result of that treatment, they left and designed their own centres.<sup>27</sup>

However, the emergence of these churches is a theological as well as a political phenomenon. Rev. Io Smith observes that among the early black immigrants to Britain were 'those with a deep spiritual awareness and steadfastness in their Christian faith and beliefs'.<sup>28</sup> The Anglican Church, in this regard, has failed to witness the message of Christ for all people. As a result, the Spirit may have found a resting place outside of her gates.

### **III. To be Black and Anglican**

St Matthew's is a predominantly black Anglican parish in Brixton. The recent history of this parish is indicative of the problems which face people who are attempting to be genuinely black and genuinely Anglican. It is located in a community which is both similar to and different from comparable black communities in the U.S. One of the similarities is that poverty and desperation, in relation to the rest of London, seem to abound. One of the differences is that there appear to be many more poor and working class white people living among black people than one would find in Harlem, for example. In 1981 the congregation was split as a result of a difference of opinion between two groups within the parish. At the centre of the dispute were the Rev. Barry Thorley, the vicar, and the Rev. David Moore, then a curate at St Matthew's. This difference of opinion was symptomatic of deep ideological and theological conflicts within the parish. What emerged were conflicting strategies for black empowerment within the Church of England. It is important to note here that there is something more than personal incompatibility involved. What happened within this parish can be seen as a microcosm of the struggle of black Anglicans generally.<sup>29</sup>

Barry Thorley is the originator of the Association of Black Clergy. This group was founded in 1981 in response to a report to the Church of England by West Indian clergy on the problems of black people in the Church. The black clergy in England felt that they were in a better position than anyone to define the responsibility and failures of the Church in this regard. Thus, Thorley convened the other black Anglican clergy and began the Association. The Association currently has three major items on its agenda. (1) The appointment of a black bishop. (2) The creation of an Office of Black Ministries similar to that of the Episcopal Church in the USA. (3) A site and programme for theological education of black candidates for ordination in the Church of England. The black bishop would provide the outward visible sign of the Church's inward spiritual commitment to the full inclusion of its black communicants into its life and worship. The Office of Black Ministries would provide a desk and staff in Church House through which relevant concerns could be brought to the attention of the Church's leadership. The issue of theological education is very important and difficult to resolve. One idea is the establishment of a theological college for black people which would specifically address their needs. A supporting rationale is that there is a 'low church' college for the more evangelical faction of the Church and a 'catholic' college for the more traditional faction of the Church. Both are based on the particularity of the liturgical life of its corresponding faction. Thus the particularity of the socio-political, as well as liturgical, life of black Anglicans would seem to warrant a corresponding training centre. These items comprise one strategy for the empowerment of black people in the Church of England.

There is, however, another strategy which is represented by the Rev. David Moore. For Moore, what happened at St Matthew's crystallized several crucial issues for black people in the Church. The first, which concerns St Matthew's particularly, is whether the agenda of that parish should be set by the white liberals, especially white women, or be guided by the specific concerns of people of colour. According to Moore, St Matthew's, was to a great degree, controlled by white liberal women, many of whom worked for Christian Aid, had feminist leanings, and were deeply concerned about the ordination of women. The suggestion is that the old-but-new conflict between the aspirations of white women and those of black people may have been partially responsible for the schism within the congregation. Moore concludes that it may be

necessary to purge predominantly black parishes of white liberal members so that the process of self-definition can take place. The second concerns the building itself. Is it in the best interest of poor black worshippers to take control of the building out of their hands and to put it into the hands of others, many of whom are not committed to the Church? Because the building equals power, the practice of turning church buildings in the black community into community centres is one way black people are disenfranchised. This diminishes, rather than increases, the power of black people in the Church of England. The third issue is whether or not the appropriate strategy for black people in the Church is to get black representatives into positions of authority or to concentrate on building black base communities within the Church. For Moore, the building of black base communities is the key to change in the Church of England. This conviction says that power must flow from the bottom up rather than the top down. The recent synodical reforms in the Church notwithstanding, this is an un-Anglican view. However, this may be something which black Anglicans might appropriate from their congregational sisters and brothers. Another factor in this particular strategy is that power in the Church is flowing away from the bishopric into specially appointed committees. Thus, the appointment of a black bishop might be more titular than real. The church might also opt to appoint a black bishop without true diocesan authority, making him, in effect, the bishop of *black* Anglicans. A fourth issue is the purpose of the Association of Black Clergy. According to Moore, the Association is concerned more with *racial harmony* than with *racial justice*: it exists solely as a political lobby for a black bishop, with their chairman as the prime candidate. A fifth issue is black Anglican worship. The black (both Afro-Caribbean and Asian) religious tradition must become a true liturgical resource, infusing the sermon, prayers and readings. It must not be viewed as *entertainment* but as a valid medium of the Holy Spirit. The sixth issue is the theological education of black Anglicans. The number of black candidates attending the Church's seminaries must be increased. As long as the current practice of admitting one or two black students at a time continues, support groups will not emerge and curricular revision will not occur.

The conflicting strategies for the empowerment of black Anglicans are, at points, very sharply opposed. However, both are energized by a common crisis. What does it mean to be black and Anglican? One could choose to either join the Pentecostal church or

simply disappear into the white structures of the Anglican church and avoid, at least temporarily, this question. But to affirm both Anglicanism and blackness is to suffer DuBois' complaint of a 'double consciousness'. The Church of England has not yet dealt with this problem, as England has not addressed what it means to be black and British. The question is one of identity. It permeates black life in Britain, dominating discussions on interracial adoption and the role of black people within the Methodist church.<sup>30</sup>

A contributing factor in this crisis is that mass immigration of black people into the United Kingdom is a relatively recent phenomenon (since 1945). Thus, there is only now emerging a mass native born black British population who must deal with the question of identity without recourse to a prior locus in the West Indies or Asia. This means that the identity crisis is particularly prevalent among the young. As David Sheppard observes:

Many parents 'are still living in the West Indies', as far as their outlook and attitudes are concerned. Their British-born children could not enter into their dreams of the Caribbean. Nor could the parents enter into the actual experience of British schools, which their children lived in.<sup>31</sup>

The problems which black youth face in Britain are particularly crucial to the church. Many black youth are finding their religious identity neither with the Anglicans or the Pentecostal churches, but among the Rastafarians. They are searching for God, but finding God only within a black milieu. The solution to the identity crisis of black Anglicans may well rest on the outcome of the conflicting strategies for empowerment. Barry Thorley and David Moore are two native born black Anglican priests. That is, neither can turn to the West Indies or Asia for their primary cultural identity. The struggle between the strategies which they represent may well determine the future of black people in the Church of England.

#### **IV. Prospects For The Future**

No one can be certain of what the future holds for black people in the Church of England. However, A. Encinas-Meade, a Pentecostal, notes that

Black ministers are faced today with both a responsibility and an opportunity to correct some cultural, environmental, and social assumptions so that black members feel more identified, and to erase those assumptions which have been written into theology that have been degrading and demoralising generations of black people.<sup>32</sup>

There is a need for serious theological reflection on the issue of racism in Britain. Kenneth Leech observes that 'the theological task is the most important, most neglected aspect' of the work of the Board for Social Responsibility.<sup>33</sup> The Church of England has failed 'to develop a theological critique of racism'. It is very significant that no major work has appeared from any British source since the 1920s which has attempted to examine racism in the light of Christian theology.<sup>34</sup> What is needed is a black theology for Britain. This theology would have to take into account the particularity of black life in England. For black Christians in the Anglican church it would have to address their problems in relation to that church. The Church of England has never taken hold in white working class communities. Yet virtually all black Anglicans are working class people from the Caribbean, while the church itself is essentially an upper class church. Thus, race and class appear to be correlative factors in Anglicanism. A black theology for Britain must take into account the history of that nation's racial policies and class conflicts. Of course the task of forging such a theology must be left to black Anglicans themselves. However, as an Afro-American and a member of a community which has historically asked the questions of faith in the light of racial suffering, I will risk the following suggestions. A black theology for the Church of England will need to (1) Have dialogue with the 'black-led' Pentecostal churches and the Rastafarian community. (2) Build alliances with the white working class people who often feel as alienated as black people in the church and whose goals may be similar. (3) Build and nurture black base worshipping communities because a theology without a community of faith is merely empty, abstract rhetoric. (4) Pursue genuine liturgical renewal because liturgy and life cannot be radically separated. The style of worship and the content of theology are intricately related. (5) Recover the Church of England for black people. The problem for black people is not just the tradition of the church – though it could certainly be challenged from the perspective of black women seeking equal participation in it – but the fact that it has been hermeneutically distorted by white people, making it almost useless for the oppressed. This theology would be an affirmation of the vitality of the Christian faith seen through black eyes, and perhaps, in the process, call the whole church back to its prophetic mandate.

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## Notes

- 1 For the following analysis, I am indebted to the Beckly Lecture delivered at the Methodist Conference in Plymouth on 20th June 1982, by R. Elliot Kendall. This lecture was subsequently published under the title of *Christianity and Race* by the Community and Race Relations Unit of the British Council of Churches.
- 2 *Christianity and Race*, p. 5
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 One of these policies was the 'hut tax'. The government imposed a tax on huts of the native peoples so that they would be forced to go to work to pay it.
- 5 Cited in *Christianity and Race*, p. 9
- 6 Ibid, p. 10
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid, p. 11
- 9 *Time Magazine*, 6th February 1984, p. 41
- 10 Many of these insights emerged out of a conversation with A. Sivanandan, the Director of the Institute of Race Relations in London.
- 11 The Rt Rev. David Sheppard (The Bishop of Liverpool), *The Black Experience in Britain – A Christian Viewpoint*. 1981, p. 5
- 12 *The Times*, 'Housing and Job Markets Still Worst for Black Britons', 6th July, 1984, p. 5. See also *The Sunday Times*, 'Surveys Reveal Racial Bias in Civil Service Jobs', 8th July 1984.
- 13 Anne Owers, *Sheep and Goats, British Nationality Law and Its Effects*. CIO Publishing, 1984.
- 14 Quoted in Tony Holden, *Black Consciousness and White Liberation*. Zebra Project, 1981, p. 10
- 15 Here one need only observe the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the coronation of the monarch, the role of the monarch in the appointment of the Archbishop, and the influence of the Archbishop in the Houses of Parliament.
- 16 OUP, 1984
- 17 One of these people is Keith Jenkins, Executive Secretary of the The Community and Race Relations Unit (CRRU), The British Council of Churches.
- 18 Kenneth Leech, *The Fields of Charity and Sin: Reflections On Combating Racism In the Church of England*. Race Relations Fieldwork Background Paper No 6. Board for Social Responsibility, 1984, p. 9
- 19 An excellent critique of Tiller's report has been made in an unpublished response by Elizabeth Varley, Fieldwork Secretary, CRRU.
- 20 Robert Runcie (Archbishop of Canterbury), *Racial Attitudes in Britain – The Way Forward*. CIO Publishing, 1982, p. 8
- 21 *The Fields of Charity and Sin*, p. 8
- 22 While there is little statistical data to support this statement, it is based on the observations of Kenneth Leech.
- 23 For a comprehensive analysis of black Pentecostal churches in England see Malcolm J. C. Calley *God's People – West Indian Pentecostal Sects in England*. OUP, 1965. Also Clifford Hill *Black Churches: West Indian and African Sects in Britain*. CRRU/BCC 1971
- 25 For an examination of a black Pentecostal church from a cultural anthropological perspective see Williams *Community In A Black Pentecostal Church*.
- 26 Alec Vidler, among others, has referred to the Church of England as 'The National Church'.
- 27 'Black Churches In Britain and Black Christianity', *Christian Action Journal*. Summer 1978, p. 5
- 28 Rev. I. M. Smith, 'Black Churches – Looking Back' in *Dialogue Between Black and White Christians: Two Papers From the Zebra Project*. Zebra Project, 1983, p. 1



- 29 I recently spent several hours in conversation with both men, and I have tried to present the view of each as fairly as possible.
- 30 The issue of placing black children in white adoptive homes has emerged as a significant one recently in Britain. Some very adamant black social workers vigorously oppose it on the grounds that it prohibits the development of a sense of cultural and racial identity in the child. Black members of the Methodist Church in Britain have recently asked the question of their identity as black Methodists. Interestingly, they have been assisted in clarifying this question by the theological writings of James Cone, Major Jones, Alan Boesak and Malcolm X.
- 31 *The Black Experience in Britain*, p. 6
- 32 A. Encinas-Mead, 'A View of Pentecostalism' in the *All Faiths London Against Racism* document, published by the Ethnic Unit, GLC, 1984
- 33 Kenneth Leech, 'Field Officer's Report' in *Report On The First Year's Work 1981-1982*, p. 4
- 34 *The Fields of Charity and Sin*, p. 9

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